Carnival Time!

Wilson Harris and the Carnivalesque

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Here we find.... chimeras (fantastic forms combining human, animal, and vegetable elements), comic devils, jugglers performing acrobatic tricks, masquerade figures and parodical scenes – that is, purely grotesque carnival themes.

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

One lives in and out of Carnival time since each element that masks us sustains time as its original medium of sacrifice within creation. Not only that. Original medium of theatre. One is the other's veil of timely or untimely dust.

Wilson Harris,*Carnival*

Contents:

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the growing appreciation of the importance of carnivalesque elements in the novels of Wilson Harris. Since all reading and criticism is partial, the introduction gives a brief summary of critical approaches to this aspect of the Harris's work. Building on the insights of these critics this study presents a short festive, folkloric and literary history of carnival from its origins, thus providing background to the celebration of the festival in the present-day Caribbean. Classic carnivalesque features are listed which, though suggestive rather than exhaustive, provide guiding criteria for the readings that follow.

While not attempting a thorough-going exegesis of Harris's critical and philosophic writing – which reveal much about his understanding and usage of carnival – I finish my history of carnival with a brief exploration of his non-fictional contributions to the subject. The following chapters divide Harris's work into four broad phases and undertake readings of a selection of his novels up to what can be regarded as their culmination or climax in the novel *Carnival.* Although the readings are essentially thematic, concerned above all with the writer's carnivalesque *vision* as conveyed in the novels, there are frequent references to his narrative techniques and this builds towards some tentative conclusions about Harris's innovations of form and the implications of this for the art of the novel.

Paul Mountfort

Introduction

The Anancy artist is the masquerading carnival figure *par excellence*.

Joyce Jonas

Caribbean carnival today (including the metropolitan celebrations spawned in such cities as New York, Toronto and London) is a multicultural ensemble, a mosaic of historic and innovative festival forms. Carnival's history resembles the course of a great river with many tributaries which has spilled into a 'callaloo of global dimensions' in the late-twentieth century, or a huge tree whose roots lie in pre-history and whose branches are the myriad post-colonial variants of the festival. In its present day forms Caribbean carnival, with its hybridization of diverse elements, reflects the wider island and mainland national life of the region in which there is a mixing of belief and religious custom as varied as races - typically one finds devotees of Voodoo, Rastafarianism, Santeria, Obeah and Shango alongside those of Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam and Hinduism. The syncretism represented by the festival, then, however fraught its origins and convulsive its history exemplifies principals of cross-cultural fertilization in the development of the Caribbean. As a contributor to *Caribbean Festival Arts* comments:

> African slaves, repatriated slaves, and Chinese and East Indian indentured labourers brought to the island [Trinidad] cultural traditions that the European considered exotic, pagan and sub-human. Today these disparate traditions blend into Carnival, giving unity and identity to a country characterised in the past by racial tension, cultural bias and religious bigotry.[1]

In cultural and artistic terms, the so called 'creole aesthetic' of an assembly of diverse, Calypsonian elements present in carnival has a broad application and makes itself

felt in many spheres in contemporary Caribbean life. This is certainly true of creative fiction. Writers such as George Lamming, Earl Lovelace, Willi Chen, Rawli Gibbons, Paule Marshall, Derek Walcott and others have engaged carnival in their works as a symbol of the region's cultural constitution (with varying degrees of ambivalence), but the central figure both in terms of *carnival as subject* and the *evolution of a new, carnivalesque form for the novel* must be Wilson Harris.[2] It is he who embraces carnival as a cross-cultural medium in its fullest potential. Michael Gilkes, in the first full length study of Harris's works, wrote that

> [a] new state of consciousness, a new and original growth in sensibility produced, as it were, by a genuine cross-fertilization of cultures and races, is the main theme of Wilson Harris's work. His novels illustrate what must be considered as perhaps the most remarkable and original aspect of West Indian writing: one in which the condition of cultural and racial admixture itself becomes the 'complex womb' of a new wholeness of vision.[3]

A realization is now emerging amongst critics that carnival and the carnivalesque are central to this cross-ferilization and have evolved into a fundamental dimension of Harris's fiction over the course of his writing career.

As a symbol of cross-cultural fertilization in the Caribbean, carnival is vital to both the material and the techniques Harris has developed in the workings of what he calls 'the cross-cultural imagination.' Carnival is both an explicit and implicit concern in many of his novels and of his writings as a whole. But before the question of what the distinguishing features of this aspect of Harris's work are is addressed, it is necessary to ask what is meant by carnival and the carnivalesque in the context of his fictions, and how does one set about reading them?

Gilkes, in a recent critical work, quotes the Guyanese artist and writer Denis Williams as having written of Harris's writing in 1969: 'We shall need to forge an entirely new critical apparatus for assessing these works. So that right now it would be a bold man indeed who would attempt a comprehensive exegesis.' He notes that since then several

full length studies have appeared, but what is needed remains 'nothing less than a revolution in sensibility; a 'literacy of the imagination' to allow in reader and critic for an openness to language as *vision* rather than exclusive intellectual meaning.'[4] I would like to address this in the present study by avoiding, as much as possible, the reductionist criteria which sometimes guide analysis and definition in criticism – to forego any attempt to trap the meaning of such terms as comedy, tragedy, sacrifice, representation, form, mask, masquerade, the grotesque, creativity, and carnival – and endeavour instead to build up a body of *fundamental associations* between carnival itself and elements which run throughout or evolve over the course of Harris's work .

What I propose is to undertake a reading (or series of readings) of carnival and carnivalesque elements in some ten of Harris's novels, chronicling their development through four broad phases of his work.[5] These readings seek not so much to present a linear argument leading up to an overwhelming conclusion – a technique of criticism Harris's fiction resists – but to discern salient features of carnival and follow certain threads in the tapestry of Harris's fictions in the process of evolution to their culmination in the most recent phase of his fictional writing, with the publication of the Carnival Trilogy. This study, therefore, should provide a frame-work for establishing what carnival is and what constitutes the carnivalesque and – allowing for the creative role of the reader in the capacity of a text to mean and the freedom of both (reader and text) – let the novels 'speak for themselves' as much as possible. The aim is to provide a catalogue or index of carnival elements in Harris's opus which, in many ways, epitomise the colourful content and innovative style and of his fiction.

A brief look at the critical contributions to the subject to date will help to establish the nature of the field and show how these elements of Harris's fiction have been read formerly. Hena Maes-Jelinek first recognised the importance of carnival in the development of Harris's work in an essay, "Carnival' and Creativity in Wilson Harris's fiction' (1986). She identifies carnivalesque elements appearing with increasing frequency and deepening significance from Harris's earliest novel, *Palace of the Peacock.*

> The penetration of masks to unravel deeply buried and unconscious residues of individual and historical experience; the need to trace and elucidate real motivations behind paradoxical or deceptive appearances; the presentation of characters associated with carnival but also representative of the sharp contrasts to be found in poor and/or colonial societies: the King, the Clown, the nameless fool who identifies with the exploited or eclipsed majority, the Harlequin; the increasing self-relexivity which intensifies Harris's fusion of 'vision and idea', the metaphorical and the abstract; all come together and illustrate his notion of comedy represented in *Carnival.*[6]

Maes-Jelinek devotes most of her attention to Harris's 1985 novel *Carnival*, though in acknowledging and briefly discussing the development of such features throughout Harris's works to their 'climax', as it were, she points to the scope which exists for a sustained reading of carnivalesque features across a series of his novels such as is undertaken in the present study.

In the wider body of criticism concerned with carnival elements in Harris's novels there appears, despite certain shared assumptions, a diversity of approaches reflecting the complexity of the subject and material. Sandra Drake's *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition* (1986), argues the importance of the festival's character for Harris's sense of 'cross cultural resemblances and syncretisms'. She refers to the important links between Medieval European and contemporary Caribbean celebrations: such as their role as a vehicle for throwing off the shackles of everyday life and enjoying dance and other performance mediums and function as a receptacle of folk-cultural forms within an oppressive authoritarian matrix.

> Much that is now tolerated in Europe as superstition or classified as folklore was once an integral part of ancient religion. Masks and dances, now a part of carnivals and spring and harvest festivals, were not dismissed as 'fetish' in pre-Christian or even in Medieval Europe, although recognition of this fact is not always overt. In Latin America and the Caribbean, however, Afro-Catholic and Amerindian Catholic syncretisms give open recognition of some elements of folk tradition that Harris insists

> must be retrieved without apology if the stasis of victor and victim is to disappear.[7]

Carnival-time, then, in Harris's terminology, overturns the 'stasis of victor and victim' and points to the medley of cultural forces which need to be given freedom if ours is to be a truly 'post-colonial' rather than Ngugi Wa Thiongo's 'Neo Imperial' age. The excavation of pre-Columbian as well as African and European folk heritages is a necessary step, Drake emphasises, towards the fertilization of what Harris has called the 'cross-cultural imagination' existing in 'the womb of space': a rebirth motif.

In her chapter on Harris's novel *Ascent to Omai* (1970) Drake identifies specific carnival themes, motifs and imagery. She notes the metaphoric signature left throughout the text by Anancy, supernatural spider-trickster of West Africa, whose transportation to and survival in the Caribbean parallels all those other 'characteristically African features and [a] characteristically African festive spirit'. Such elements transformed the nature of European carnival celebrations transplanted into the New World. She discusses limbo dancing along similar lines, with reference to Harris's ideas on the subject. Also identified are some of the stock characters of Harris's novels - scarecrows, limbo-dancers, pork-knockers, clowns, and 'eccentric mad personages' - whose *grotesquerie* (an important term in this study) testifies to a vision that is both traditional to a carnival milieu and highly innovative. In Harris's 'alteration of proportions' (another important term) Drake sees the role reversals typical to carnival consciousness, as well as a commentary on what could well be called the circus of colonial and post-colonial conditions. Observing that 'Carnival and Anancy are of African inspiration', she asserts that 'Carnival's use of altered proportions... becomes both inspiration and metaphor for Harris's work as a whole'.[8]

One of a number of essays published recently on the subject is Russell MacDougall's 'Wilson Harris and the Art of Carnival Revolution' (1987) which identifies among other things codes and conventions of popular or revolutionary dialectic translated into literary form in the novel *Carnival*. McDougall analyses elements in *Carnival* according to Bakhtin's classic criteria for European 'carnivalised literature'. Such features

as rhetoric and Socratic dialogue, festive laughter and parody, the 'eccentricity' of the artist and 'ambivalence' of his representations, McDougall argues, find new life in synthesis with Caribbean folk-cultural forms in Harris's *Carnival*. Among these he discusses limbo dancing as a vehicle for satirical performance (in the light of related elements in the text), a vital aspect being the theme of cultural 're/memberment' of diverse elements in limbo perspective. Carnival, in danger of compromise as a festival conscripted to economic ends, 'sponsorship dismembering rebellion' – Simon Gikandi raises similar concerns for carnival becoming 'ossified into a commodity' in the modern Caribbean[9] – is seen by McDougall to be revivified in true spirit through the innovative approach of Harris in his fictions.[10]

In a seminal work for the study of Afro-Caribbean fiction, *Anancy in the Great House* (1991), Joyce Jonas develops an incisive approach for appreciating the unique character of Caribbean carnivalised literature and Harris's particular 'alteration of proportions'. In a chapter entitled 'Clowns and Carnival', Jonas elaborates her model of the creator-artist as trickster-shaman with reference to carnivalesque structures and devices found in George Lamming's *Season of Adventure* and *In the Castle of my Skin* and Harris's *Genesis of the Clowns*. She identifies a 'limbo-void of dialectic' in which change can occur between the 'monolithic architecture of oppression' and 'images of sexuality, fertility and growth' expressed in the 'creative impulses of the repressed folk'. The comic exploits of the trickster as artist are at once self-sacrificial and revitalising for his audience. His habitats of marketplace, thresholds, and cross-roads are the centres of intercourse (social, economic, and sexual) in daily life. Through such fissures in totalitarian structure s/he draws out the 'alternative' or 'unwritten text... of memory and folktale, landscape and plantation, of the vernacular and the calypso, of an inheritance passed on through proverb and religious ritual'. An example of such religious ritual and practice central to Harris's 'drama of consciousness' are the divinities (or ritual archetypes) of Haitian voodoo. These, among other mythological masks or anterior identities residing in the narrative 'weavings' of the author's invite a 'multiplicity of readings' of the text.[11]

Although these critics approach the subject from differing vantage points, there is a certain consensus, and synthesizing their insights points towards an appropriate methodology for this study. All of the critics recognise the appropriateness of carnival as a feature of and metaphor for the cross-cultural elements Harris employs in his writings. Maes-Jelinek shows the roots of Harris's carnival vision in the earliest novels, and its climax in the novel *Carnival*; thus pointing to the potential which exists for following these elements from the beginning to the latest phase of his writing. Drake links modern and older carnivals in their role as a receptacle of folk forms, emphasising the great importance to Harris of the buried cultural heritages residing in carnival; an observation which suggests the efficacy of a survey of the cultural (festive, folkloric and literary) history of the celebration. McDougall shows how Bakhtin's interpretive schema can be adapted in the context of Caribbean carnival forms, and Jonas presents a new model for the appreciation of Caribbean carnivalized literature. Her model of the writer as Anancy artist harmonizes with Drake's recognition of the fundamental affinity between the character of modern Caribbean carnival and the author's works as a whole and the role of Harris as carnival artist.

Here we are looking at a larger sample of Harris's works than any of these critics discuss at length. Rather than undertaking a thorough-going exegesis of the complementary fictional and philosophic aspects of Harris's opus, I begin by following Drake's cue and look at the background to the festival, its presence in the Caribbean, and the various cultural accents its encompasses as a multicultural complex. The first chapter of Carnival Time, therefore, is historical. It sets the scene of carnival's presence in the Caribbean today, presenting a history of the festival, its representational forms, and gives a brief summation of its present day aesthetic dimensions. This leads to the formulation of a provisional set of characteristic carnival elements - *what constitutes the carnivalesque* - for the purposes of this study which the following chapters (two to five) will locate within the framework of open readings of Harris's novels. It ends with a brief discussion of Harris's role as a literary artist in the light of the signifying codes of carnival and its aesthetic dimensions, including a short commentary on carnival as it figures in his

critical/philosophical works. This explains more precisely how carnival relates to Harris's 'cross-cultural imagination' and sets the scene for the readings which follow.

These readings, organised into chapters representing four broad phases of Harris's fiction, are designed to illustrate something of the diverse nature as well as essential coherency of the author's unique carnivalesque vision. They do not attempt to effect closure but reflect what one of Harris's characters called 'the open-ended circus of reality'[12] – a fitting phrase for this aspect of his creator's novels. Functioning individually, sequentially, and synchronously, they reveal some of the major thematic clusters that spiral around carnival throughout the writer's fiction and comment on some of the narrative techniques which are an attribute of his carnivalesque vision. While only engaging Harris's critical and philosophic work fleetingly, this study still should go some way towards explicating the multivalency of the festival in Harris's vocabulary. The final chapter deals with the latest phase of Harris's work, including the Carnival Trilogy, which, in lieu of further novels, represents the culmination of Harris's carnival and therefore serves as a conclusion.[13]

The title of this study, Carnival Time!, alludes therefore to the yearly occurrence of the festival, its dynamics as a medium of time and experience in its own right, its incidence and fruition over the course of Harris's writings and the implications of this in the advent of new, carnivalesque forms in twentieth century Caribbean literature. Just as the next chapter, 'Carnival's Passages', suggests how diverse and complex a phenomena carnival is across time, making clear that there is no one carnival but a multitude of forms, the readings presented in chapters two to five are, necessarily, a selective and subjective appreciation of the spread of carnivalesque features across Harris's fictions: but this admission is equally a celebration of the infinite capacity of the texts at hand to yield meaning. In the words of a commentator on Caribbean festival forms – in a statement that can apply to texts, readings, and modes of criticism as to canons:

'Gone is the notion of a single canon. Bring on the Callaloo!'[14]

Notes

1 'Masquerade Mix-up in Trinidad Carnival: Live Once, Die Forever', John Nunley in Caribbean Festival Arts: each and every bit of difference, John Nunley and Judith Bettelheim, Seattle and London: The Saint Louis Art Museum in association with University of Washington Press, 1988, p.85

2 For example, see Ch. 2, 'Clowns and Carnival' in Anancy in the Great House: ways of reading West Indian fiction, Joyce Jonas, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990, for a discussion of carnivalesque elements in George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*; 'Metaphor and Symbol in the Dragon Can't Dance', Harold Bennet in World Literature Written in English, Vol.23, No.2, 1985 pp405-13, for a discussion of those in the work of Earl Lovelace; 'Willi Chen and Carnival Nationalism in Trinidad', Steve Harvey in Journal of Commonwealth Literature Vol 25, No. 1, 1990, pp.121-131, for those of Willi Chen; 'Finding a Truer Form: Rawle Gibbons's Carnival Play *I, Laweh*', by Elaine Savory Fedo in Theatre Research International, Vol 15 (3), Autumn 1990, pp.249-259 for those in the drama of Rawle Gibbons; and Ch 5, 'Modernism and the Masks of History: the Novels of Paule Marshall' in Writing *in Limbo*, Simon Gikandi, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992. pp.187-90

3 Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel, Michael Gilkes, London: Longman Caribbean 1975, p.xxvi-ii

4 The Literate Imagination, Michael Gilkes (ed), London: MacMillan Caribbean 1989, p.1

5 The two existing full length studies devoted to Harris's opus as a whole (Gilkes, 1975; Maes-Jelinek,1982) both include a similar number of texts and are not significantly longer than the present study. The difference here is that the inclusion of texts is selective rather than representing the full body of novels published by Harris to date.

6 'Carnival and creativity', Hena Maes-Jelinek in Gilkes, 1989, p.49

7 Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition: a new architecture of the world; Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, Number 93; New York: Greenwood Press, 1986, p.42

8 Ibid, pp.140-141

9 Writing In Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature, Simon Gikandi, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1992, p.187

10 'Wilson Harris and the Art of Carnival Revolution', Russel McDougall in Commonwealth Essays and Studies, 1987, Vol 10 (1), pp.77-90

11 Jonas,1990, pp.11-14, 51-53, 57, 71-72

12 Black Marsden, Wilson Harris, london: Faber, 1972 p.7

13 Both previous studies of Harris's which entail a similar reading across a number of his novels (see footnote four) end not with conclusions, but with with an analysis of the final novel in the series under consideration constituting a natural culmination of the argument. Gilkes does appendage a 'Postscript' to his Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel'; however, this does not fulfil the function of a conclusion. This approach seems to suit the nature of Harris's work well, and has been adopted here as equally suitable for the thesis form of critical study.

14 'Recapturing Heaven's Glamour: Afro Caribbean Festivalizing Arts', Robert Farris Thompson; Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988. p.29

I

Carnival's Passages

> The world of the gods and demons, the carnival of their masks and the curious game of 'as if' in which the festival of the lived myth abrogates all the laws of time, letting the dead swim back to life, and the 'once upon a time' become the very present - we must approach and first regard with the artist's eye. [1]
>
> Joseph Campbell

> Festivals are a way of bringing about change. People are allowed to say not only what they voice in ordinary life but what is going on within their minds, their inner grief, their inner resentments. They carry peace. They carry violence. The masks and songs can teach or curse, saying in their forms matters to which the authorities must respond or change. [2]
>
> Fu Kiau Bunseki

The callaloo of modern Caribbean Carnival has come to typify, in many respects, the cultural and aesthetic make-up of the region's societies, and the emigration of West Indian and other ethnic groups to Europe has returned carnival to its original source in what has been called an artistic 're-colonization'.

European colonizers of the Caribbean carried with them to the 'New World' from the sixteenth century onward biases which inclined them to regard the beliefs of vanquished indigenous peoples – imported slaves or indentured folk brought as labour for the development of the region – as 'pagan and subhuman'. This pattern of thought had been implemented at home against local heathen beliefs over the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries under the auspices of the witch-craze and Inquisition with inhuman cruelty. However, in the pre-Lenten revels of carnival vital to the cultural life of many great European cities and numerous towns and villages survived remnants of Europe's own

ancient pagan heritage – pockets of pre-historic ritual, classical Greece and Rome, pagan Europe. These elements, when translated into their New World settings, would ultimately become the receptacle of diverse new cultural forms and syncretisms.

This chapter presents a history of this archaic festival's presence and development in the New World, moving from pre-historic 'proto-carnivalesque' elements to some present day festive forms. Because in 'undressing' Caribbean carnival one uncovers layer after layer of cultural costuming through time and across diasporas, the account that follows is necessarily a selective description, even simultaneously a deconstruction, of the presence of certain important features. (Space permits only scant regard for many associated phenomena which – using the term carnival generically to include the other festivals that are 'carnivalesque' in nature – illuminate the general principals of festival art and folkloric elements under consideration.) Such a survey of the passages of carnival, however partial, reveals the richness and diversity of elements in the festival through disparate eras and cultures to the present day, as well as identifying some essential continuities. A mosaic of features are sketched, from the past to the present, ending with a discussion of the aesthetic principals of Caribbean festival arts and the appropriateness, in the light of his critical and philosophical ideas, of drawing an analogy between Wilson Harris and the figure of the carnival artist today.

A summary of some essential features of carnival and the carnivalesque provides a set of criteria which, although admittedly partial, guide the identification of carnivalesque features in my readings of the novels under study. By reading Harris in the light of some fundamental historic features of carnival we can form a picture of how carnivalesque indeed are the novels represented in chapters two to five and how fitting is the description of Harris as a carnival artist.

Archaic and Classical Antecedents

Evidencing precise 'survivals' in the sphere of modern festival life and folklore from diverse continents of the globe and periods as distant as the neolithic and even paleolithic is a difficult and often dubious practice. However, Frazer showed in *The Golden Bough* that the roots of carnival lie in archaic calendrical rites enacted in celebration of the replenishment of game and the fertility of the earth widespread across the world in pre-history. At the centre of such rites lay a complex identification between the animal, human or – later – 'carnival' (i.e. effigy) to be sacrificed and the god or goddess presiding over death and revivification. Since the divinities propitiated were always composite figures incorporating bestial or vegetative along with human features, the efficacy of the ritual was underpinned by a notion of a continuum of parts or interpenetration of spheres of nature, humanity, and the divine. The medium of this lived experience and its archaic representational modes is, furthermore, the milieu in which the use of masks evolved. For 'animal and bird masks represent the early paradisal state when communion between gods, men and animals was natural.... They can also denote the instinctual and intuitive animal wisdom from which man can learn.'[3]

Typically such Spring celebrations in early agricultural societies in the Eurasian sphere included sprinkling the fields with the blood of a freshly sacrificed beast, usually of the domesticated variety like a bull or a goat. In various places at certain times the sacrifice was human, a virgin or youth – sometimes an enemy captive, but equally possibly a member of the tribe favoured for this great honour – who was made 'King' or 'Queen' for a ritual number of days preceding the rite: that is to say, indulged and fattened before being slain. Frazer demonstrates that these rites form a direct parallel with similar African and Meso-American rituals, giving even carnival's distant origins a global dimension. According to the principal of composite identity, mourning for the victim would become in effect the funeral rite of the dead god or goddess of game, vegetation or

the sun. At the same time, the celebrants often treated the 'deceased' in a derisive fashion, tantamount to mocking or scoffing at the divinity, in what is called 'ritual laughter'.[4]

Possibly the first literary account of such celebrations is Ovid's description of spring rites enacted by Arcadian shepherds, who sacrifice a goat, eat its flesh, make whips of its skin; then at sunset priests decorated with its blood and paint lash a procession of naked male and female celebrants who move joyfully through the streets of their village.[5] Persistence – at least in mimicry – of some of these features, for instance the ritual lashings, into present day Caribbean festivals is difficult to explain and their widespread diffusion and survival may be attributable to elements (in this case the perverse desire for purification through flagellation) endemic in the human psyche. The festive perception of the world, in its many variations, is sustained by the understanding that the natural complement to death is renewal and that men and women can be reconciled with, celebrate, and even sway these laws through calendrical rites. The enactments common in early Eurasian agricultural societies of the 'sacred marriage' and the rites in which men and women joined in sexual union in the fields to exert sympathetic magic over the spirits of vegetation and demonstrate to them what was desired for the sake of the bounty of the harvest, illustrate the last point.[6]

Such 'proto-carnivalesque' elements and others are found in attenuated form in the two ancient Roman festivals (or festive complexes) acknowledged as the Classical antecedents of modern carnival. The most commonly cited, the famous, or infamous, Saturnalia, though falling between the seventeenth and twenty-third of December – more comparable to Christmas than Shrove Tuesday or Ash Wednesday – had features which endured into carnivals thousands of years later. Frazer called it 'the carnival of the antique world', while Bakhtin stated that the tradition of the Saturnalia remained unbroken and alive in Mediaeval carnival.[7] The festival's revels, which often bore the stamp of an upheaval of lust, crime and violence, centred on the enthronement of the ephemeral King of Saturnalia as Lord of Misrule. This young man chosen by lot reigned over what was styled as a temporary reversion to the mythic golden age of Saturn when all people – slave

and freeman – were supposed to have been equally at liberty to enjoy the bounty of the earth.

As a festival celebrating the intermediary period between the end of one year and the start of the next, the Saturnalia was a cyclic eruption of primordial chaos in which, in Seneca's words, 'all Rome went mad.' Thus, 'to symbolise both chaos and the equality under the Golden Age, all laws, civic and moral, were suspended and slaves and masters changed places, slaves being waited on and allowed unlimited license and prisoners were freed.... The festival was marked by orgies, carnivals and transvestism...'[8] A giddy processional moved through the streets of Rome, complete with triumphal marches and the enactment of funerary rites of notables headed by its illegitimate King – until at the conclusion of the festival he suffered the fate of being torched and burned in effigy. The execution of the 'carnival' was certainly enacted in mimicry of earlier customs in which there was human sacrifice during such celebrations and Frazer notes how in at least one case a victim was actually chosen and murdered as part of the Saturnalian revels.

Within the mixing of sombre mythical themes and funerary rites in a mood of hilarity, ridicule and Dionysian celebration of the body can be glimpsed the fundamental affinity between the Saturnalian revels and such Classical representational forms as the 'Satyric' drama, ancient Attic Comedy, the antique mime and others.[9]

Perhaps the more calendrically sound antecedent of modern carnival is the Roman Lupercalia, from *luperci*, Greek priests who built their temples and brought their customs to Rome. This festival was celebrated yearly on the 15th of February, originally, it is thought, in honour of Pan; although it has also been interpreted as propitiatory to the wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus, possibly evinced by the bronze statue of a wolf which stood in a cave nearby the site of its celebration at the foot of Palantine Hill. There the officiating priests sacrificed goats and dogs with whose blood they anointed the foreheads of consecrated youths (*lupercai*). Wool dipped in milk was subsequently used to wipe off the blood: a symbol of rebirth. The lupercai donned the skins of the slain animals, whose hides were also cut into whips with which they proceeded to slash anybody they chanced upon while careering through the city. The associations with

fertility are suggested among other aspects by the custom that barren women suffering cuts from these whips were cured.[10] In fact these *februa* (whips) were distributed liberally amongst the people so as, through flagellation, they could purify themselves of their faults or sins before the gods. Another rite enacted by the lupercai – which bears a striking similarity to certain Yoruba processional rituals discussed later in this chapter – was the encirclement of the arena of celebration for the purposes of consecrating it and banishing evil: for next the lupercai 'make the rounds of the Palentine, thus putting it in the magic circle which both enclosed the sacred space and warded off evil spirits.'[11]

The climax of this religious festival – underpinned by a formal religious order with a large priesthood, temples, devotees and complex rites – was Rome's favourite holiday and with time it appears the spiritual function waned and the celebrations became a mad carnival that 'degenerated into an orgy of lust and pain.'[12] However, it is not always easy in such cases to distinguish between degeneracy and deepest religious impulse.

The Attic spring rites which although not Lupercalian were 'celebrated as a carnival with feasting, merriment, masquerades and Saturnian license' exemplify this admixture.[13] Brought by the priests of Galli to Rome, male initiates to the religion re-lived the myth of their god in a thoroughly vicarious act of sacrifice. Attis was said to have emasculated himself under a pine tree; the pine, as well as corn, being a symbol for Attis, a tree spirit and god of vegetation. Initiates of the Gallic priesthood would, at the climax of festivities, in imitation of their god's sacrificial wounds, castrate themselves at the Temple of Cybele and splatter their blood on a rustic alter consisting of a felled pine tree swathed like a corpse and adorned with violets (the flowers of Attis) and an effigy of the youth. After the emasculation survivors donned the clothes of women and prostituted themselves to men on the streets in much the same fashion as noble ladies would during the Lupercalia.

This masquerade and sexual debauch, religiously motivated, resembles the general atmosphere of license of the Saturnalia and Lupercalia in which disguise allowed rape, robbery, the slaying of enemies to go unpunished. With social barriers down, 'slave and freeman, patrician and pauper ran riot in the streets of Rome hand in hand.' After a

day of rest, the street processions began: images of the gods were exhibited in wagons drawn by oxen and garlanded with flowers. People followed barefoot, until at the banks of the Almo (a tributary of the Tiber), priests in purple robes washed the images and oxen, refreshed the garlands, and the processions were renewed. [14]

Within the picturesque and lurid details painted above emerge some basic features of the carnivals of antiquity. Firstly, the element of lived myth. Whether it was in the festive revival of the age of the god Saturn or the imitation of Attis by the Gallic priests, the sentiment underlying participation in these revels was the enactment or celebration of myth. And these myths share a common genealogy back to ancient hunting and agricultural perceptions of the cycles of life, death and rebirth. Saturn was a god of agricultural cycles – cyclical time – summed up in his scythe. Attis, amongst other revivificatory gods of the hunt or of vegetation, held for his devotees the promise of a new life, as did gods of rebirth or resurrection such as Osiris or Christos. Thus the 'period of misrule' marked by the celebration of the bodily principle occurs at a turning point in cyclical time, a medium of both sacrifice and revivification. Processionals represented the throng of the living and the dead, while masks and costumes could be of an initiatory character (expressing through the incorporation of animal elements the sense of composite identity underlying the life of the festival), subversive (suggesting a reversal of social hierarchy), or could function to disguise the revellers and allow them greater license.

With the rise of Christianity, the apparent debauchery of these customs came under increasing attack. By the fifth century of the Christian era many ancient pagan customs and festivals had been given Christian titles and significances. Certain rites to Apollo, Adonis, and Attis, for instance were incorporated into Easter to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The Lupercalia's spring and rebirth motifs were modified; the festival, placed just before the deprivations of Lent was given a new name in accordance with its new, somewhat muted function: *Carnelevamen*, consolation of the flesh. About the year 600 A.D. Pope Gregory fixed the date of Ash Wednesday as the first day of Lent, formalising Shrove Tuesday as the climax of three days of feast and festival. As a splurge

of earthly delights preceding days of sombre asceticism, the Carnelevamen continued for centuries, becoming *carnvale* in Italy, *carnaval* in France, Carnival in England – as popularly interpreted, farewell to the flesh.[15]

Medieval and Renaissance Carnival

'Doubtless the Roman Saturnalia continued to live during the entire Middle Ages....' wrote Bakhtin. 'The tradition of the antique mime also remained alive. But the main source was local folklore.'[16] The Middle-Ages, the productive base of which was still largely agricultural, was deeply involved with the festive perception of the world in its aspects of life, death, and renewal. One of the central features noted by Bakhtin is the translation of the spirit of the Classical celebrations we have glanced at into the peculiarly Medieval perception of the 'two world condition' – the juxtaposition of the high and low, the mortal and divine, the solemn and the festive. Showing that carnival (as well as the carnivalesque features of spectacles, epic parodies, miracle and morality plays, and the diableries of the mystery plays) derive from folk culture and consciousness – the natural theatre of which in Medieval times was the market-place – he goes on to comment on the dynamics of carnival space and time as a realm of its own.

> During carnival time life is subject only to its own laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit: it is a condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants.[17]

Characterised by a great gulf between authoritarian culture and that of the populace, festival life acted for the Mediaeval world, according to Bakhtin, as a receptacle for the 'collective ancestral body of all the people.... the unfinished broken body (dying, bringing forth and being born).... not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries, it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects.' The often atavistic myths underlying this outlook were lacquered with layers of Christian imposition over the course of the Middle Ages, but in many respects this remained a superficial gloss. A mosaic of features attest to the 'genetic link of these carnivals' and carnivalesque forms 'with ancient pagan festivities, agrarian in nature, which included the comic element in their rituals.'[18]

The survival of pagan folklore across Europe into recent times has long been a matter of controversy, but it is indisputable that European peasantry and town-folk maintained a patchwork of beliefs and customs for centuries against the aggrandisements of the Church. Carlo Ginzburg, among other cultural historians and folklorists, has argued for the widespread dispersion of quite archaic features in the popular religions of the Mediaeval and Renaissance periods. Such popular religion revolved around gods or goddesses connected to the hunt, cycles of agriculture, fate, fortune and the world of the dead. Tending towards ecstatic experience, women's beliefs centred on a coterie of funereal and revivificatory goddesses often subsumed into figure of Diana – 'goddess of the pagans'. Hallowing such figures as Wotan, Odin, Arthur and Herlechinus who led the mythical Wild Hunt, men were largely concerned with ensuring the fertility of the fields, placating the dead, and otherwise ensuring good fortune and warding off evil.[19] These divinities – male and female – were generally semi-bestial in character, presiding over what can be regarded in broad terms as a popular religion of death and revivification or rebirth.

The presence of bestial traits in many carnivalesque representational forms of the Middle Ages, such as Mediaeval comic theatre, which fed into the Miracle and Morality plays of the times, is in part explained by the archaic character of popular belief. As Bakhtin wrote: 'The Mediaeval epic parodies are animal, jesting, roguish, foolish; they

deal with heroic deeds, epic heroes, and knightly tales.'[20] These parodies treated mythic figures and themes whether Christian or pagan (many pagan as well as Christian beliefs and rituals became allegorized into literary form and/or dramatised in the Middle Ages) with the 'gay relativity' characteristic of the carnivalesque. Examples of such folk drama are 'The Feast of Fools', 'The Sword Dance', 'The Morris Dance', 'The Robin Hood Plays' and the Masque. The Mediaeval Theatre, despite ongoing secularisation, retained intimate links with the common origins of theatre as a medium for both the enactment of ritualistic complexes and *carnivalization of the sacred.*

That this pagan spirit or sensibility of a rival world outlook subsisting in the Middle ages sat uneasily with the Church fathers is evidenced by the pains taken to assimilate it into the Christian calender. Bruegel's famous sixteenth century painting 'COMBAT BETWEEN CARNIVAL AND LENT' encapsulates the clash of the festive outlook and its Christian interlocuters. In the foreground is a mock battle between fictitious sovereigns – one seated on a throne, the other enthroned on a barrel of ale. Minstrels and maskers, mendicants and 'mummers' mill about in the market-square. To the right of the canvas a procession of nuns spills out of a cloister, one praying, another clutching her bible, others stooping to the poor. In the background villagers are engaged in all manner of shenaniganry: gaming, prancing, circle dancing. A similar atmosphere is evoked in this popular verse from England in the same period:

> Some run about the streets attired like monks
> and some like kings,
> Accompanied with pomp and guard and other things,
> Some like wild beasts do run abroad in skins that diverse be,
> Arrayed and eke with loathesome shapes that dreadful are to see.
> They counterfeit both bears and wolves, and lions fierce in sight,
> And raging bulls; some play the cranes, with wings
> and stilts upright.[21]

Although dramatists of the Christian Liturgy were not above incorporating humorous elements to capture the interest of the audience and illustrate scriptural truths, it was the

increasing colonization of Biblical dramas themselves by carnivalesque mockery in the productions of the market-place (a central carnivalesque locale and arena) which offended orthodoxy. The combat expressed in Bruegel's depiction is between a populace for whom life, death and the otherworld could be sent up through ritualized revelry incorporating dancing, feasting, laughter, and the authoritarian dictates of the Church for whom this was profanity.

Carnival itself continued to function as a receptacle for diverse mythic themes and motifs in times when pagan beliefs could see one tortured and killed, as can be illustrated with a few examples. In a sixteenth century record of the Nuremburg carnival, a figure Ginzburg identifies as Holda (a local pagan goddess) appears as a fictitious sovereign enthroned on a cart, subject to derision and mocking, with a train of soldiers disguised as women following behind. In German villages until the early seventeenth century at Shrovetide there existed a custom in which two 'Wild Men', one wearing a costume of brushwood and moss the other dressed in straw, were chased through the streets. Upon being overtaken, there was a pretence of stabbing and shooting them until they fell 'dead': they were then placed on boards and carried to an inn. Similarly in Bohemia 'burying the Carnival' involved the 'execution of a 'wild man' which was the next day thrown into a nearby pool. The Saxons of Transylvania used to hang the 'Carnival' after a mock trial beneath a tree, suspending this straw man from a branch with a rope about its neck. After notables informed it of its crimes it was summarily buried.[22]

In Catalonia, a 'real' funeral was held for the Carnival, which enjoyed the honour of riding upon a hearse attended by maskers dressed as priests and bishops and 'mummers' wearing crepe with blazing flambeaux. At the funeral oration devils and angels burst forth to take the body captive, but it was nonetheless buried at midnight on Shrove Tuesday. Frazer records the custom from the Abruzzi in which a pasteboard figure was carried through the streets by grave-diggers – reminiscent of the Barons of Haitian folklore – with pipes in their mouths and bottles of wine slung at their shoulder belts. A 'wife' of the Carnival walked in front lamenting his untimely death.[23] From seventeenth century Frankfurt comes evidence of the enactment (probably at carnival time, but in any

case in a carnivalesque spirit) of the folkloric theme of the furious army or Wild Hunt in which a cart was drawn about the city with hordes of masked children in train playing the cohorts of the dead who would knock at the doors of houses begging alms or food.[24]

These processionals, as was true for those of the Classical world, were clearly connected with the very ancient notion of the periodic return and need for propitiation of the dead. The Nuremburg case attests to the incorporation into the festivities of a local goddess of a semi-bestial nature who doubtless presided over a popular cult of death and rebirth. In the account from Frankfurt there is a definite hint of initiatory rites possibly related to the folkloric theme of animal metamorphosis. The figure of the Carnival recalls ancient sacrificial rites in which the animal/vegetative, human and divine spheres are linked in the context of revivificatory rites that developed independently in different regions. The widespread dispersion of such elements testifies to the fact that the ancestry of carnival in its Mediaeval and Renaissance forms was profoundly mixed, and that its continuing expression was a testament to the tenacity of pagan folklore and festivity.

In the Renaissance, the masked comedies with stock characters of the Harlequin Theatre (known to the eighteenth century as *Commedia dell'arte*) which gained popularity in Italy in the sixteenth century attest to similar bastard origins. It is often said that the source of this dramatic convention is arcane. Evidence of this is provided by, among other things, the presence of one Herlechinus among the ancient pagan gods of the Hunt mentioned earlier. Furthermore, in provincial rituals such as the *charivari* of Theselly can be glimpsed the sort of milieu out of which this sophisticated theatre of masks evolved. For the *charivari* masked youths forming a 'tumultuous squad' led by a mythical god of the hunt known as Harlequin made processionals through the towns and villages begging alms and gifts while behaving in a clowning, obscene and somewhat threatening fashion. There were analogous customs across Europe and Asia often involving similar elements such as the Swiss *Schurtendiabe* who would, at carnival time, descend from the woods masked to loot villages, their bodies wrapped in sheepskin, their waists adorned, like a jester's cap, with cowbells.[25] In such masquerades and 'animal pantomimes', certainly pre-historic in their genesis, it is possible to recognize the rustic parentage of the masked

buffoons of *commedia dell'arte*. The aesthetic principles of Harlequin Theatre, its emphasis on sensuality, are also keeping with the celebratory qualities of carnivalesque representation discussed: 'Actions, words, colours, music [song and dance], were all here combined in a single appealing whole.'[26]

Within the life of the popularity of Harlequin Theatre, however, we are in the province of the circumscription of carnival in European culture. From the carnivalesque in the works of Rabelais and the plays of Shakespeare to those of Moliere and the commedia dell'art, Bakhtin identifies a diminutive formalisation in the repertoire of the grotesque. Carnival, lying at the borderline between art and life, was increasingly refined out of life and abstracted in art. The puritan sensibility, especially, was intolerant of the revels of carnival and the caprices of carnivalesque features outside of festival life. As Allon White observed: 'From the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries we see literally thousands of acts of legislation introduced to eliminate carnival and popular festivity from European life.'[27] The apotheosis of this came in England with the persecution of theatrical troupes and Cromwell's condemnation and banning of theatre itself. It is true that in France and Italy in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and even nineteenth centuries carnival enjoyed considerable popularity. In France it remained fashionable with favoured writers during and after the life and times of Moliere. Balls, street processions, and masking, too, were fashionable as never before. In Venice, by the eighteenth century, carnival had come to occupy half of the year, with masquerades lasting a full six months. Although the French revolution brought with it the banning of masks, costumes and *Mardi-gras* as vices of the aristocracy, the people kept up the tradition in celebrations of their new found liberty and Napoleon later reinstated carnival to the streets and boulevards of Paris in triumphal parades. Carnivals remained popular in such European centres as Madrid, Barcelonia, Geneva, Vienna, and Warsaw; though in England they died out sooner than elsewhere.[28]

Yet there is a sense, undeniable by the nineteenth century, that the zenith had been reached and something of the substance of the festival had passed away, just as Bakhtin complains that in its literary equivalents the carnivalesque had been reduced to the grotesque pastiches of Romanticism with its emphasis on individual alienation rather than

collective felicity, or the diminutive 'grotesque' of the nineteenth century realist novel. Not until the literary (and other) experimentation of twentieth century modernism and post-modernism was a form of carnivalesque – though perhaps 'a fantasy bricolage, unanchored in ritual and therefore set adrift from its firm location in the body, in calender time, and ritual place'[29] – to find its way back into a prominent position in European art and discursive life.

The New World and Global Carnival

From the beginning of European expansion Spanish, Portugese, Dutch, French, English and other settler communities sought to transplant as much of their native cultures as possible to the soil or sands of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas, India and Asia, Australia and Polynesia. Contact with indigenous peoples upon the shores and in the hinterlands of these regions with Europeans was characterized by the power of the invaders to implant their religious, economic, political, cultural and technological agendas. Each century of colonization reflects the competition between and shifting biases within empire building nations. Church, commerce, state, humanism and science each in their turn rationalised the establishment of suzerainty and the projects of annexation.

The Caribbean was the scene of the first footfall of European presence in the 'New World'. Genocide for the original Amerindian inhabitants and the conscription of African slave labour to build agricultural gardens and *palazzi* for the plantation owners was the initial legacy of the colonization of this continental zone and its equatorial islands. The premises, therefore, of contact were not conducive to sustained cultural exchange, but to the rape of the weaker party by the stronger. Even where the visitors encountered evidence of 'high civilisation', such as in Meso-America, ingrained bias were often a

stumbling block to the recognition of affinities within cultural difference. A remark by one Bishop Landa of Yucatan in the times of Cortes is broadly illustrative of this attitude.

> We found a large number of books of these characters, and as they contained nothing but superstition and lies of the devil we burned them all, which the Indians regretted to an amazing degree and which caused them great anguish.

Consequently, it is difficult to recover an understanding of much of pre-contact cultures from what remains. As an essayist analogized:

> A visitor from space who had only the Athanasian creed, Dante's Inferno, the Phenomenon of Man, Old Moore's Almanac and the oral evidence of an Irish or Sicilian peasant would be hard put to it to work out a coherent statement of modern Christian belief in the after-life.[30]

The feeling of cultural illegitimacy for subsequent generations in the Caribbean – neither European, African nor indigenous – in the wake of colonisation is a recurrent theme in Caribbean literature. Comments of Derek Walcot's, among those of other writers, on Trinidadian national theatre express defiance toward colonial legacies of pastiche cultural forms, especially in the context of latter-day economic exploitation by the West.

> Every state sees its image in those forms which have the mass appeal of sport, seasonal and amateurish. Stamped on that image is the old colonial grimace of the laughing nigger, steelbandsman, carnival masker, calypsonian and limbo dancer. These popular artists are trapped by the State's concept of the folk form, for they preserve the colonial demeanour and threaten nothing. The folk arts have become the symbol of a carefree, accommodating culture, an adjunct to tourism, since the State is impatient with anything which it cannot trade.[31]

It is not cultural bastardy itself Walcott is objecting to, but its shallow patronage - in both senses of the word - by those who have little care for searching beneath the congenial

veneer which these folk forms present to the world. To what extent does the history of carnival in the Caribbean support such a repudiation?

From the Renaissance through to the eighteenth century's so-called Age of Enlightenment, European colonization implanted its cultural forms in the Caribbean, including carnival, the antecedents of which lie in archaic festive rites in early hunting and agricultural societies. Imported to Europe's newly founded slave colonies in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, carnival fulfilled a complex function. During the days of the plantation house, the life of slaves was ruled by the iron hand of their masters, in bondage to agricultural cycles and the European profit motive. Carnival, although largely monopolised by the white Creole establishment, must have come as a brief respite from the abiding tyranny, a period in which the existing social order satirized itself and a certain Saturnalian license could be enjoyed.

It could, of course, be said that carnival gave only a fleeting and unconvincing illusion of liberty squarely on the terms of the slavers and that the spectre of enslaved Africans conscripted into pantomimes or their master's breeches (as millenia before their ancient Roman counterparts had changed costumes with their masters) for a day or two a year was a parody, rather than expression, of freedom. People in bondage fighting to preserve their sanity and culture, however, are forced to make use of the materials at hand. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo (an author, incidentally, whose recent works especially have carnivalesque features) wrote a searing novel on rolls of toilet paper while imprisoned in his homeland for having written a play in Gikuyu (a banned tribal language): the toilet paper given him by his torturers was thus converted into a priceless manuscript. Given the documentation of the secret societies of slaves common throughout the Caribbean, through which Africans sought to maintain tribal culture in the face of brutal opposition, it is not unlikely that the liberties of carnival were comprehensible to the African festive sensibility and provided some opportunity to express publicly otherwise banned cultural forms.

In European descriptions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from various parts of the Caribbean of the pantomimes of the slaves at the plantation houses, there is

often civilized shock expressed at their primitive *grotesquerie*. Early in the tradition of Jamaican masquerades, for example, Africans dressed in animal costumes incorporating such elements as ox horns or boar tusks in their headdress impressed white audiences by the strangeness of their gestures and general behaviour. This reaction has recently been read by commentators on the history of festival arts in the region as a response to cultural difference, and possibly, therefore, a sign of African performance elements subsisting beneath the assumed European forms.[32] This is like African religious elements (such as the propensity for possession by spirit) finding a niche within the Christian church in the southern United States. In light of the scarcity of material on the history of carnival's development in the New World, the heterogeneity of African tribal regions represented in the Caribbean, the shortfall of material available for interpreting African beliefs, it is obvious that establishing the presence of precise subterranean cross-cultural relationships in the early phases of Caribbean carnival is outside the scope of this study.

However, a brief sketch of some features of African festival art suggests the likelihood of the survival of African elements through the hell-gate of the Middle Passage into later times. Not only that, but the presence of an unconscious commonality submerged and subsisting between cultures in these rituals. For there was, in the enactment of Renaissance and Enlightenment carnivalesque customs by enslaved black people, a faint echo at the bottom of the well of the common origins of festival life.

Grotesquerie is, of course, a long established and central attribute of European carnival forms: a distant heir to 'primitive' conventions of festive laughter and mocking the deity in the context of early rituals. Still a vital element in the Middle Ages and significant in Renaissance culture, by the time of the Europe of the Age of Conquest, as was Bakhtin's complaint, its function had been refined into oblivion or conscripted into realistic representational modes (literary or dramatic). It is well known, however, that elements of these early rituals from which literary conventions of the grotesque are ultimately derived were widely dispersed across the world in neolithic times and that festival life in regions of the globe as widely dispersed as pre-contact Africa and Mexico bears striking similarities to that of Eurasia. For instance, in the enactment and celebration

of mythical themes and the presence of funereal and initiatory rites surviving in European carnival; in African festival life these elements are alive to a marked degree.

Among the Dogon of the Niger River Delta, for instance, masking societies (initiatory in their function) exist for every circumcised male of the tribe. Sculptural masks are used in dances at funerals, in mourning ceremonies and processionals that lead to the funeral pots of the ancestors. There are related rites which ensure fertility (particularly the fecundity of women), rain, abundance in general and protection against witchcraft. *Siriage* 'masks' (that sit at the top of long, tapered poles) are used to evoke the action of the supreme god *Amma* in creating the world, and thus the performances or ritual dramas in which they are used refer to primordial events. Other 'masks' evoke central events in Dogon cosmography. A Dogon elder, Ogotemmeli, told an anthropologist who had been initiated into the tribe's traditional arcana: 'The society of masks is the entire world. And when it moves onto the public square, it dances the way of the world, it dances the system of the world.'[33]

Among the Bambara of Mali, in the dramatic representation of the people's cosmology and creation myths, a range of zoological masks are used to recall various cosmological elements or events. The Bobo (of Burkino Faso) possess masks of leaves seasonally used 'to re-establish the broken equilibrium so that the order established in the cosmos may continue to exist'.[34] Yoruba and Congo concepts of parading and processional form particularly clear parallels with elements in the Eurasian sphere. The spiraling forms traced by the Egunegun dancers as they enter a village or town, such as in the *Beere* Festival of *Oyo* in which the palace walls are circumnavigated, is a ritual encirclement which connotes the rolling away of misfortune and the evocation of communal felicity. Congonese ritual processioners ideally carry fortune and spiritual rebirth to the villages they encircle. This further brings healing and 'cooling' and reinstates the ancestral, otherworldly powers at the centre of the community.[35]

The Yoruba term for Egunegun costuming, *ago*, is derived from a verb meaning 'to be visually mysterious' in the sense of a ritual covering of the entire body which protects the wearer from profane eyes. Over the face is placed an *awan*, a netted shield,

which constitutes an *eku*, something death connected. Thus the mask marks the border between the world of the living and the otherworld.[36] In brief, African use of masks and other festival elements have a function that is religious, secular and, as in Eurasia, profane. Primordial beings are depicted, mythical ancestors, culture heroes and gods in dramatic enactments in which 'comic or satirical episodes are frequently integrated into ceremonies of a religious character.' In Africa itself the tenacious survival or adaptation of these functions of the mask – despite the distortion wrought by cultural exchange – testifies to their profound ongoing significance to life. Henry Pernot writes: '[t]he extent to which they deal with identity is also one of the principal reasons why the masked ritual endures even after Islamicization or Christianization of the society has caused the figures and events that are staged to lose their religious character.'[37] The conclusion must be that 'African sources within carnival are more difficult [than European sources] to pinpoint, because the forms have changed. Yet the underlying aesthetic sensibility remains the same.... Carnival costumes derived from African sources assumed different shapes. Their character, however, remained solidly African.'[38]

One of the central features of the Caribbean aesthetic is the capacity for the incorporation of diverse and at times apparently discordant elements – not only European and African but Amerindian, Meso-American, Middle-Eastern and Asian – within a unifying whole. Nunley writes of cross-cultural, shamanic dimensions of the 'creole aesthetic':

> Old World African and Hindu shamanistic religions played significant roles in shaping this aesthetic. In such religions, foreign deities were easily absorbed. Since all things have spirits, the shaman artists controlled or interpreted the animistic world by reorganising objects into what one calls works of art. These objects in turn reorganise human experience, lifting it to ecstatic states.

Obeah masquerades in Trinidad, for instance, in which costumes contain semiophores with symbolic associations such as skulls, bones, shells, feathers, and sceptres, refer to the ritualistic paraphernalia of the African derived cult of Shango. Pre-Columbian motifs

include the Red Indian masquerades played by Amerindian half-castes who were seasonal labourers in South America in the middle of the twentieth century, and ongoing use of figures of the rain god Tlaloc and Quetzalcoatl from Mayan and Aztec religions appeared in masks and costumes so that 'the spirit of the original settlers return each year with carnival', fulfilling a new variation on the ancient theme of the return of the dead at carnival time.[39]

The spectre of the Amerindian processional is an image and metaphor vividly adapted in several of the novels looked at in this study as a symbol of cultural inheritance and dispossession. Although the Amerindian heritage deserves more attention than space permits here, it is important to note that, however intangible the legacy of extinct or decimated cultures and civilizations in the Americas, it is a complex and vital undercurrent in carnival celebrations to the present day, well known to the world, for instance, in the feathered bonnets typical to New Orleans' mardi-gras. Thus the very condition of cultural bastardy (or mixed origins) has become an aesthetic principal and carnival today can be viewed as the vehicle, rather than negation, of a complex response to the legacies of Caribbean life.

The fecund growth and artistic virility of Caribbean festival arts to the present day, though threatened by economic conscription, certainly attests to such a vision. Comments by Fu Kaiu, a costume designer for the 1983 Trinidad Carnival, express such possibilities inherent within the representational forms of Caribbean festival art.

> First of all, this mask proclaims the power of life within the ocean. Using this metal crab, we descend below the waves by means of the power of the white's machines. So doing, we can talk to our ancestors, and they can bless our technology. The mask proclaims a machine for descending below the waves, a machine built on the premise of a crab. By using this metal machine crab we can show the modern world both our modernity and antiquity, and our power to fight and win our space within both worlds.[40]

Over several hundred years of hybridization carnival has become a major event in the Caribbean and serves as a commentary on the cultural and artistic (as well as economic) development of the region. Furthermore, Caribbean carnival, despite the dangers of commercialism, as a vehicle of 'creole aesthetics' mirrors the currency that the artistic community of the Caribbean has gained throughout the world, so that it has been proclaimed that 'the formerly colonized now aesthetically colonise their former masters.' Or, as a jingle runs:

> This English gentleman, he say to me,
> He do not appreciate calypso melody,
> But I answer that calypso has supremacy
> To the Light Programme music of the B.B.C.[41]

What is true for Trinidad is also true of a troupe of carnivals and other festival celebrations (and a profusion of associated carnivalesque forms) across such Caribbean nations as the Bahamas, Bermuda, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Belize and Guyana. For Carnival itself is but one of three major Caribbean annual festive celebrations, the other two being Jonkonnu and Hosay, exhibiting a history of continuous hybridization since their earliest presence in the region.

> Festival arts.... provide variants on a common theme. The ingredients throughout share common feeling and intent, even if the forms are different. Masquerade, to disguise and affirm, is everywhere in Jonkonnu, Carnival and the religious rituals which themselves are a form of festival sharing common practices, correspondences (symbolic systems), and similar exegesis whether it is Cuban Santeria, Jamaican Pukkumina, Guyanese Cumfah, Trinidadian Shango, [or] Haitian vodoun.[42]

Although each celebration has its own lineage (Carnival from pre-Lenten festivals of Europe, Jonkonnu from a melding of British 'mumming' and African performance traditions, Hosay from enactments of Islamic myth and ritual), they share family resemblances and can all be viewed in their modern forms, ideally, as expressions of the

so-called 'creole aesthetic' of the assembly of diverse elements into a unifying whole. In carnival, as nowhere else, cross-cultural elements have often overcome hierarchical division and sheer mutual hostility to join and create forms of vitality and originality, 'a high effect collage combining strongly contrasting elements. Words such as mosaic, collage, and contrast repeatedly come to mind.'[43] As such – and as a vehicle for political satire, period of freedom from tiresome everyday commitments, symbol for death of the old and renewal, expression of unity and difference, Carnival embodies the fundamentals of the contemporary Caribbean arts.

As a celebration across time, carnival and carnival-time today when it arrives in the Caribbean, or in pockets of Caribbean culture abroad, is no one thing but an experience of great variation and complexity. An impressionistic sketch of the festival's history has yielded certain characteristics of the carnivalesque as a multi-media phenomena, which although they cannot be formalized into a set of absolute criteria, can be represented by setting out some of carnival's fundamental signifying codes through the ages to the present day.[44] These are, of course, open to interpretation, but a provisional list of central features can be drawn up as follows:

- a calendrical conception of time incorporating vestiges of ritualistic sacrifice in the execution of a 'Carnival' or scapegoat; subsequent renewal, celebration!
- a metaphysical continuum of parts from the bestial to the divine, blending with objects, semiophores or 'fetishes'
- rituals of mask and masquerade, with accompanying theatrical dimensions and other representational expressions (the 'grotesque')
- the 'carnivalization of the sacred' through parody and/or satirization of existing religious and temporal order with, for example, techniques of inversion such as the crowning of a 'King of Misrule'
- the eruption of primordial chaos in the celebration of the period of misrule, when freedom can spill over into licence, allowing a suspension of given laws in which violence (such as murder and rape) may occur

- the important theme of the return of the dead which brings into play the phenomenology of an 'ancestral body', so that the dead 'swim back to life' during the festival
- carnival is also a receptacle of oppressed folk forms, 'pagan' religion, cultural 'otherness' and a vehicle for assertion of these elements
- carnival, especially in the modern Caribbean, is a cauldron of cross-cultural elements, expressing aesthetic diversity, and contributes to the Caribbean or 'creole aesthetic', a collage, a callaloo of global proportions.

How do these features relate to Wilson Harris and his writings?

Wilson Harris - Carnival Artist

The history of carnival and its passages shows just how appropriate a metaphor the festival is for cultural syncretism and the workings of what Harris calls the 'cross-cultural imagination'. Caribbean carnival for Harris represents among other things a possible *coniunctio* (alchemical marriage) of cultures – if the historical soil of the festival in the arena of cultural exchange is unearthed for its fertilizing properties. This casts Harris in a revolutionary role. Revolution for Harris lies in the perception of redemptive possibilities in societies suffering from a crumbling imperial legacy rather than in revolutionary violence, which may reinstate the evils it seeks to overthrow when human nature itself have not been sufficiently transformed. As stated in the introduction, the cross-cultural dimensions of carnival are inspirational for Harris's thought and can be applied metaphorically for his works as a whole – indeed, the author himself has been compared to a carnival artist.

While Walcott has repeatedly repudiated the pastiche of certain folk-cultural forms in the Caribbean, Harris has expressed his conviction that the Middle Passage – despite the horror of the slave-experience in the Caribbean and Americas – acted as a 'limbo gateway' through which tribal elements from Africa have been, ultimately, re-membered into new, diverse forms. As mentioned in the introduction, this study makes no claims for presenting an exegesis of Harris's critical and philosophic writing. However, a brief review of some material from this sphere illustrates how each of the classic carnival characteristics present in the list of features drawn up above has an application for Harris's ideas regarding modern, post-colonial civilization, its modes of literary production and what Harris believes is the responsibility of the creative artist in the light of this.

The essays in *Tradition The Writer & Society* (1967) reveal that at this comparatively early stage in his thought the latent potentialities of carnival are germinating in Harris's mind. At the close of the first essay 'Art and Criticism', he states:

> A great deal of thought and probing becomes necessary to plumb the real meaning of creative literature or art. And on this essential appraisal and dialogue the survival of the artist must depend. Whatever happens – art will always be – since life in its essential contradiction is art: it is the deep unconscious humour of carnival.[45]

This statement is elucidated by following essays which set out the role of the West Indian or Caribbean artist as one whose creative material is the broken, fragmentary and even curiously a-historical experience of the West Indian individual, in the search for the fulfilment rather than consolidation of character. In 'Books – A long Term View' Harris presents that broken legacy as consistent with themes of sacrifice running throughout civilisations in their cycles of growth, breakdown and renewal. He also locates within the Caribbean and South American strands of tradition which have the power to supplant the 'pseudo-classical' bastion of values he attacks. These include the 'sophisticated irony of a primitive art' gaining 'grotesque ascendency' over its colonial master forms.[46]

In 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel' Harris asserts that it is only through visionary insight that individuals can transform the broken legacy of the Caribbean history into genuine community, an imperative reflected in a literary sphere in the need for artists to develop new, creative strategies running counter to established, reactionary forms.

> In the epic and revolutionary novel of associations the characters are related within a personal capacity which works in a poetic and serial way so that a strange jigsaw is set in motion like a mysterious unity of animal and other substitutes within the person. Something which is quite different from the over-elaboration of individual character within the conventional novel.[47]

In attacking modes of realism in widespread use by his contemporaries as a vestige of nineteenth century European hegemony and advocating, among other things, a jigsaw representation of character incorporating 'animal and other substitutes', Harris's is repudiating the dominant mode of representation in literature in favour of the grotesque of carnival and its representational modes: something which he does not appear to believe other creative writers in Caribbean literature have sufficiently addressed or achieved.

In 'The Writer and Society' Harris puts forward Haitian *vodun* (Voodoo) as a medium which embodies many of the qualities needed to reanimate creative fiction. He describes the possessed dancer as moving 'like an authentic spectre or structure of fiction', and refers to the ritual as 'one of the surviving primitive dances of ancient sacrifice...courting a subconscious community.'[48] This fascination with voodoo, a cross-cultural matrix related to carnival, runs throughout Harris thought, reappearing, for example, in the later philosophic and critical volume, *Explorations* (1981), in an essay entitled 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guyana'. While he refers particularly to limbo dancing and *vodun*, the principal of 'a new architecture of cultures' applies to a range of syncretistic, carnivalesque forms which have evolved in the Caribbean.

> It has taken us a couple of generations to begin – just begin – to perceive in this phenomenon, an activation of unconscious and sleeping resources

> in the phantom limb of dismembered slave and god. An activation which possesses a nucleus of great promise – of far reaching new poetic form.
>
> For *limbo* (one cannot emphasize this too much) is not the total recall of an African past since that African past in terms of tribal sovereignty or sovereignties was modified or traumatically eclipsed with the Middle Passage and with generations of change that followed. *Limbo* was rather the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures. For example, the theme of the phantom limb – the reassemby of dismembered man and god – possesses archetypal resonances that embrace Egyptian Osiris, the resurrected Christ and the many armed Goddess of India, Kali, who throws a psychical bridge with her many arms from destruction to creation.

Particularly noteworthy are the implications of the phrase 'a new poetic form'. The readings of Harris's fictions in the following chapters will highlight the innovative narrative forms he employs and their relationship to carnival.

While carnival's history over time, in particular its capacity to act as a receptacle for folk forms, explains in part the notion of an accommodation of legacies and reassembly of communal, cross cultural elements, the passage above shows that for Harris these facts have a higher, symbolic significance. The cross-cultural imagination itself as he posits it resembles the Jungian concept of a 'collective unconscious' or 'world consciousness' whose essential unity of content underlies the diversity of imaginative forms across cultures and civilizations. This reappears in the way in which Harris understands the catholicity of the muse described in a later passage of the same essay.

> In this context it is interesting to note that *limbo* - which emerged as a novel reassembly out of the stigmata of the Middle Passage - is related to Haitian *vodun* (though possessing a direct link with African *vodun* which I shall describe later on) also seeks to accommodate new Catholic features in its constitution of the muse.
>
> It is my view – a deeply considered one – that this ground of accommodation, this art of creative coexistence born of great peril and strangest capacity for renewal – pointing away from apartheid and ghetto

> fixations – is of the utmost importance and native to the Caribbean, perhaps to the Americas as a whole. It is still, in most respects, a latent syndrome and we need to look not only at *limbo* or *vodun* but at Amerindian horizons as well - shamanistic and rain-making vestiges and the dancing bush baby legends of the Caribs (now extinct) which began to haunt them as they crouched over campfires under the Spanish yoke.[49]

In the critical and philosophic essays of *The Womb of Space: the cross cultural imagination* (1983), Harris further draws out the implications of such cross-cultural, carnival elements both for genres of fiction and the dilemmas of the colonial and post-colonial age.

> In the context of carnival or masked comedy and upheaval which disperses reflections of form (reflections on the mutability rather than immutability of character) we may perceive, I think, the fascinations of *shared ego or desire for conquest* entrenched within cultures. This brings home the reality of evil, in which cultures are enmeshed in codes to invert or overturn each other rather than become involved in complex mutuality and the difficult creation of community.

Among the implications of this 'complex mutuality' is a repudiation of the passivity of the victim in favour of a challenge to dominant modes of representation which offer only 'hollow' defiance to cultural exploitation and artistic hegemonies.

> Tragedy lives, and within our carnival age it implies a passivity that accepts the fate of catastrophe with little or no genuine complaint, it accepts the ultimate inversion of all by a structured and tamed nature that becomes, in stages, a decadent and fatally diseased or exploited muse. Carnival tragedy stresses, therefore, ultimatum or the hollow mask it wears with a semblance of dignity.[50]

The attachment of such connotations to carnival needs to be understood in the light of the central feature of Harris's writing mentioned above: a repudiation of 'classical realism'

and even the 'classical grotesque' in favour of complex and innovative narrative responses to the impasse seen to be embodied by these conventional forms.

Carnival, therefore, in Harris's vocabulary has multivalent significations which encompass both the sacrificial circus of cultural exploitation and stasis or limbo in the arts and the means by which they can be overturned or 'remembered' – through the vocalization and celebration of cross-cultural principals inherent in the festival and Caribbean society. His understanding of the festival is consistent with its history, recapitulates many of the classic themes of carnival time, yet articulates novel and unpredictable imperatives residing in that history that bear upon the art of fictional writing.

Harris's vision is organic and multifaceted and his fictions are a web of metaphoric correspondences which efface what Soyinka criticized as that 'chronic habit of compartmentalization'[51] Western culture has developed and which is expressed in dominant modes of representation and narration. Denis Williams's observation that there has not yet emerged a critical apparatus fully equipped to deal with the astounding innovations of Harris's texts is still, to an extent, true.[52] Therefore, although the readings which follow in this present study are guided by the set of features or criteria advanced above, the following chapters, rather than trying to compartmentalize or effect any kind of closure of the texts, seek to open them through attention to such correspondences as they develop through the body of Harris's work. Essentially thematic explorations of the writer's fictional vision, they emphasise the inexhaustibility of the texts and partiality of interpretation. The patterns which emerge bespeak a writer who has created out of the material of 'cross-cultural tradition' a profound divination into humanity's plight in an endeavour to stimulate the 'play of [cultural] values' in our global age vital to his hopes for renascence in the arts. Having 'cooled' the arena of ritualized debate, then, let us now enter the magic mirror of the texts themselves, for in the words of a nameless participant:

'*Carnival is pan; pan is hot*'

Notes

1 Primitive Mythology, Vol. 1 of The Masks of God, Joseph Campbell, London: Penguin, 1959;1976, p.21

2 'Recapturing Heaven's Glamour: Afro-Caribbean Festivalizing Arts' Robert Farris Thompson Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988, p.23

3 The Aquarian Dictionary of Festivals, Jean Cooper, London: Harper Collins, 1990, p.141

4 Rabelais and his World, Mikhail Bakhtin, trans. from the Russian by Helene Kwolsky; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968;84 , p.7

5 Mardi-Gras, Robert Tallant, Gretna: Pelican, 1976, p.85

6 Ibid, p.84. see also the source in Frazer, 1922; 1987, p.39-142

7 Bakhtin, 1968;1984, p.8

8 Cooper, 1990, p.192

9 Bakhtin, 1968;1984, p.19

10 Everyman's Classical Dictionary, John Warrington, London: J.M. Dent, 1961, p.326

11 Cooper, 1990, p.137

12 Tallant, 1976, p.85

13 Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, E.O. James, London: Thames and Hudson, 1961, p.191

14 Tallant, 1976, p.87

15 Ibid, p.88-89

16 Bakhtin, 1968;1984, p.81

17 Ibid, p.7

18 Ibid, p.19; p.8

19 Ecstasies: deciphering the witches' sabbath, Carlo Ginzburg, trans. from the Italian by Raymond Rosenthal; New York, Random House, 1991, p.101

20 Bakhtin, 1968;1984, p.15

21 Cooper, 1990, p.197

22 The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion, James Frazer(abridged) London: MacMillan, 1922; 1983, p.306

23 Tallant, 1976, p.93, 94

24 Ginzburg, 1991, p.183

25 Ibid, 1991, p.191,

26 The World of Harlequin, Allardyce Nicoll, London: Cambridge University Press, 1963, p155.

27 'Hysteria and the end of Carnival: festivity and bourgeois neurosis', Allon White in The Violence of Representation: literature and the history of Violence, Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (ed.s), Essays In Literature and Society Series, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 160

28 Tallant, 1976, p.92

29 'Hysteria and the end of Carnival: festivity and bourgeois neurosis', Allon White Armstrong and Tennenhouse (ed.s), 1989, p. 160

30 'The Civilisations of pre-Columbian America', Crispan Ticknell in Life After Death, Arnold Toynbee and Arthur Koestler, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976 pp.68;70

31 See Introduction to Dream on Monkey Mountain, Derek Walcott, 1970, p.7

32 'Jonkonnu and other Christmas Masquerades', Judith Bettelheim: Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988,

33 Ritual Masks: deceptions and revelations, Henry Pernot, translated from the French by Laura Grillo, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992, pp.45

34 Ibid, p.61; 63

35 'Recapturing Heaven's Glamour: Afro-Caribbean Festivalizing Arts' Robert Farris Thompson: Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988, pp.19-23

36 Ibid, pp.26-27

37 Pernot, 1992, p.79

38 'Masquerade Mix-up in Trinidad Carnival: Live Once, Die Forever', John Nunley: Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988, p.88

39 Ibid, pp.88; 99; 97

40 'Recapturing Heaven's Glamour: Afro-Caribbean Festivalizing Arts' Robert Farris Thompson: Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988, p.25-26

41 Ibid, p.17

42 'Implications for Caribbean Development', Rex Nettleford, in Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988, p.190

43 'Jonkonnu and other Christmas Masquerades', Judith Bettelheim: Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988, p.61

44 In drawing up guiding criteria for what constitutes the carnivalesque I have tried to avoid reductionist tendencies as much as possible and provide instead a flexible set of features which can be adapted to readings of Harris's novels. Peter Stallybrass, in an analysis of carnivalesque elements in Robin Hood narratives and plays from early modern England advances for the purposes of his study a 'tentative morphology of the carnivalesque' more closely associated with linguistic devices than mine, which is essentially based on festive and folkloric themes. He writes 'I would argue that we should analyze the carnivalesque as a set of rhetorical practices within the social, a set which includes, but is by no means limited to, linguistic devices.' This set includes: 1. The replacement of fast by feast; 2. Transgression of mutual barriers; 3. Transgression of bodily barriers; 4. The inversion of hierarchy; 5. The degrading of the sacred; 6.

The transgression of the linguistic hierarchy.' ('Robin Hood, the carnivalesque, and the rhetoric of violence', Peter Stallybrass, in The Violence of Representation: literature and the history of violence', Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (ed.s), Essays in Literature and Society Series, London: Routledge, 1989, p.46

In reading Harris's fiction for the carnivalesque it is not possible to provide such exclusive formula, but in any case, as Stallybrass comments, '[c]arnivalesque meaning [is] never a simple given'. The criteria I advance represent but one possible point of entry in to the field.

45 Tradition the Writer & Society: critical essays, Wilson Harris, London: New Beacon Publications, 1967; 1973, p.12

46 Ibid, p.24-25

47 Ibid, 1967; 1973, p.38

48 Ibid, 1967; 1973, p.50

49 For this and above passages see the essay 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guyana', Explorations,Wilson Harris, Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1981, p.26-27

50 The Womb of Space: the cross-cultural imagination, Wilson Harris, Contributions in Afro American And African Studies, Number 73, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983, p.13

51 Myth, Literature and the African World, Wole Soyinka , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Canto 1990, p.6

52 See p.3-4 of the Introduction to this thesis (reference collected in footnote four)

II

'The Scene of the Infinite Rehearsal'

The Guyana Quartet comprises Harris's first four novels published over as many years (1960-1963), each set largely in the interior of his Caribbean/South American homeland, a landscape which the author has described as 'the scene of the infinite rehearsal'.[1] A realm of ill-defined borders and precarious settlements with an ecology of river and rainforest which Harris surveyed extensively for the Government of British Guyana from 1942 to 1953, Guyana's interior becomes in these novels a metaphysical stage and its inhabitants are charged with mythic resonances by which they are transfigured into a dramatic cartography of the spirit. Much of the mix of folkloric beliefs of the land and its people permeate these novels, from indigenous myth and legend to African 'superstition' and there are definite festive, carnivalesque elements. Hena Maes-Jelinek has stated that:

> Although it may not have been immediately obvious, already in his early novels Wilson Harris was using carnival, a major cultural event in the Caribbean, in much the same way as he used Caribbean history, searching through (through and beyond are words he frequently uses) its obvious significance for a deeper meaning.[2]

Guyana's river networks and environs in the *Quartet* are an experimental theatre of existence, a melting-pot and testing ground, at the heart or headwaters of which lies the elusive El Dorado, earthly reflection of the mystical City of God, but this almost

Dantesque sense of sacral cartography is counterbalanced by a comic sensibility for the 'altered proportions' of existence in the light of the cultural and racial diversity that is Guyana's population (the ubiquitous 'crew' of the river voyages) and the broader human/divine comedy. The period is the mid-twentieth century, yet for Harris time is like the Greek *ouroboros* (serpent swallowing its tail): a cyclic *and* transcendent entity. This cyclical (interpenetrative, spiraling) sense of time in both its calendrical and cosmic implications means that historical period is seen to intersect an eternal now: also a prerequisite for carnival-time.

As demonstrated at the close of the last chapter, Harris has stressed, from the outset of his career, in lectures, talks, essays and through his creative writing the importance of cross-cultural legacies (Amerindian, African, European and others) to his works. Diverse ethnic and cultural traditions provide the myth structures and aesthetic codes which inform his innovative narratives: a heritage epitomized by carnival as event and metaphor. Yet while the sources of Harris's motifs and images are often precise, his novels are first and foremost creative reworkings which attain a universality and – as the author has often said – maintain openness to the uncovering of unsuspected parallels in the womb of the 'cross-cultural imagination'. This attests to a conception of the people of the earth as so many branches of a single tree who share at root a 'collective' or 'world-unconscious', for in Harris's work syncretism is a principle that aims to create unity out of diversity through the creative imagination. Carnival-time is also dream-time, the province of all 'other' or alternative realities.

The microcosmic glass or magic mirror of the author's fictions reflect the archetypal and therefore cross-cultural configurations in everyday experience, unfolding unsuspected identities through the shifting masks of character, to create a bricolage that is epic in a sense unique in twentieth century writing. At least one of the novels in the *Quartet* entertains carnival as an overt theme and this chapter establishes the general foundations of Harris's early use of carnival and the carnivalesque.

Palace of the Peacock (1960)

The Palace of the Peacock, first and most famous of Harris's novels, is in part a blending of sources and influences into a fiction that has what could be called proto-carnivalesque tendencies. It contains the stylistic seeds of much of the later work of the author: dense language, a non-linear plot sequence, with characters who begin to blend into one another and other 'departments' of the natural world against a backcloth of mythical, dream or carnival time. The themes set forth in this reading comprise Harris's initial treatment what in later works become undeniable carnival concerns.

The opening pages of *Palace* are permeated by the final stanza of Yeats's 'Under Ben Bulben' in which the poet, having prophesied his own demise, addresses the spectre of Celtic mythology's otherworldly Horseman of Death. In the shooting of the conquistadorial figure of Donne which commences Harris's first novel, horse and mount – 'demon and horseman' – are melded into a single apparition witnessed or dreamed by the narrator, Donne's brother and alter-ego. The horse and horseman in Harris's fiction are recurring emblems which occupy a position between the worlds of the animal and human, the dominant overlord and semi-domesticated 'savage'. On a cross-cultural level, in Caribbean folklore they are often associated with the divinities who ride them, and so possess a supernatural character, a point to which we will return in later chapters. As such they conform in broad terms to the carnivalesque principal of a continuum of animal, human and divine parts, a representational aspect of Harris's work encountered throughout our readings.

Donne, rider and 'devil', as he is frequently called, mysteriously lives to command a *doppelganger* crew of 'active ghosts' (p.33) whose namesakes perished on an earlier expedition up the unnamed river into the Guyanese interior in a journey which turns out to be a passage into the otherworld and beyond. The events of the novel from the outset, therefore conform to the fundamental carnival characteristic of the return of the dead to life.

A recurrent device identifiable in Harris's novels is that of the mystery which comes to take on the significance of a Mystery: a *mystere,* as devotees of Voodoo say.[3] How can Donne have died yet still appear as a central actor in the fiction? Because the very nature of a *mystere* is that it is never solved as such, *a multiplicity of readings becomes possible.* Hena Maes-Jelineck, in seeking to explain the paradox of Donne's curious afterlife decided that what is occuring from the opening of *Palace* is the flight of the human consciousness through the events of life from the moment of death.[4] Such a dissolution in the novel of the 'conventional' boundaries between life and death is by the same stroke a reconstruction of imaginative unity insomuch as all 'traditional' societies posit some form of interpenetration of the realms of the living and the dead. In the belief systems of the pre-Columbian Americans, for instance, 'first and perhaps most significant is the belief that death is no more than a turning point in life: indeed death and life are two aspects of the same thing.'[5] The same is true in African religions, where ancestral spirits have traditionally been a lively element of communal existence. The processional of the dead and notion of a turning point in cyclic time which Donne and crew represent connects in an innovative way with a vital element in carnival celebrations across time.

The dominant feature of Donne as he pores over the 'map of the savannahs' is his desire to conquer 'flood, drought, chicken, hawk, rat, beast and woman': a commentary on the colonizing ethos. Mariella, his Amerindian mistress, he 'governed and ruled like a fowl.' (p.20) He is thus an imperial, authority figure; a ruler. As object of Donne's desire Mariella is his slave – flesh and blood territory to be colonised, with promise of sensual riches – but in a lightning reversal she turns upon and murders the conquistador. Donne has unseated or dethroned himself by 'turn[ing] Mariella into a vulgar musing executioner' (p26) who refuses to remain in the state of abjection in which he casts her. In a sense, then, the novel depicts a period of misrule in the form of a reversal of mythic status and authority which is actually a balancing of the slate, a carnival time in which the captive is freed and the oppressor dethroned.

As the woman who personifies the Amerindian folk and the shrouded hinterland they inhabit, Mariella is not simply one indigenous woman in the history of colonization.

She shares her European name with the Mission above the falls and is the motivation of the boat journey and pilgrimage upriver: for 'the whole crew were blasted and rooted in the soil of Mariella like dead imprisoned trees' (p.40). In another aspect she appears as the archetypal feminine helpmate in the form of the old Arawak woman (hag, belldame, wise-woman) with an enigmatic 'wrinkled map' (p.51) for a face who is purloined into directing the ghostly yet living crew in their canoe, which thus becomes a ritual vessel in their rites of passage or initiatory journey. This function is fulfilled by water-going craft in many of the world's ancient mythologies: for instance in the Chinese mythic and philosophic motif of crossing the great water, certain Norse Sagas, Celtic *immrama* voyages, Greek epics and Maori *waka* traditions. The boat voyage into the Amazonian hinterland – the earthly search of Donne and his crew for El Dorado, city of gold – viewed from beyond the grave is converted into a visionary and spiritual journey, whose hunted objective is reinstated in another guise as its patron goddess in an indigenous yet universal city of God that is musically manifest in the novel's final refrains.

The 'immortal chase of love on the brittle earth' (p.31) which fuels the action of the narrative is a metaphor not only for the survival instinct and dictates of eros and desire, but for the wider predatory dimensions of existence: THE HUNT. As the first chapter of this study witnessed, it was out of the psychology of the hunt that the earliest revivificatory rites evolved and carnival contains memories of ancient sacrificial rites connected with the replenishment of game and the theme of the hunt remains an element in carnival celebrations. The theme of the chase or hunt conveys in *Palace* the 'primitive' sense of men and women as game caught within the drama of evolution in a self-devouring creation. There are countless references to literal and symbolic wounds which recall the flesh and blood fragility of humankind and the religious gestures (such as sacrificial rites) which have evolved to cope with this fact.

Each of the crew members is described at various points in terms of their masked (hidden or parallel) animal likenesses (animal familiars or totem spirits) which implies conventions of grotesque representation and illustrates the fact of human participation in a wider chain or web of being. Each part is prey to another. Yet the

'sacrificial' images of wounds and death which occur throughout this and later novels are always found within a regenerative trope, recalling, for instance the deaths of Osiris, Christ, and other slain divinities who symbolise the revivificatory potential in cyclical time.

> The murdered horseman of the savannahs, the skeleton footfall of the river bank and in the bush, the moonhead and crucifixion in the waterfall and in the river were over as though a cruel ambush of soul had partly lifted its veil and fact to show that death was the shadow of a dream. (p.32)

Behind the veil of the mysteries of life which Harris alludes to with non-sectarian religiosity, death, metaphoric or literal, leads to re-memberment or resurrection, just as in festival life rites of sacrifice are seen as a necessary process for rebirth to occur.[6]

The carnivalesque reversibility of the roles of hunter and hunted manifest in the novel is grounds for reflection and a possible revisioning of premises, given the value of sacrifice in sustaining the parts of a greater whole. Mariella, the hunted woman, is, as we saw, equally huntress and vehicle of the death of the members of the expedition as the journey to the illusory El Dorado assumes fatal proportions. 'They were the pursuers, and now they had become the pursued.' (p.84) This paradoxical identity is a revelation of the figure of a goddess who in yet another guise is the 'crumpled bosom' (p.62) of the river itself: organ of nourishment and watery grave. This accomplishes the reversal of the status which man has accorded himself of nature in recent cultural history. The novel reinstates Mariella, the land itself, as a 'Queen' of the realm in the final scenes where she appears with child in a window of the mystical Palace of the Peacock. The death each man suffers – in part through her – is also revealed as a window into realms of resurrection or rebirth in the spirit, and she thus appears to be crowned as a revivifacatrix of human game, a womb of rebirth.

On reaching the falls across a 'musical bridge' the processional of dead crew members attain to the eternal centre of the wheel of birth and death and rebirth where all is dissolved in mystic union. Thus 'Death with capitals' (p.103), the androgynous

'Huntsman of death [who] stood winding his horn in the waterfall' (p.105) at the end of the journey personifies the ultimate fate of every living being (in later novels Death is more actively personified and takes on features of carnivalesque representation, such as the Billionaire Death of *The Infinite Rehearsal*). Yet death also opens the gates to an ecstatic mode of experience for the crew. For Donne, the spectre of his desire is unravelled in a 'threadbare' vision of universal Mother and Child chiselled by the emblematic carpenter in 'Christ's tree and home' in the workshop of the multi-cultural gods (p.106) who reveals to him his part within a larger tapestry of existence. This apparition prefigures his vision of the 'palace of the peacock' which is in fact the 'palace of the universe' which is celebrated at the close of the novel, for as a Yoruba proverb states: 'when heaven hears the visual voice of the peacock's feathers, heaven is activated'.[7] Here each crew member finds that 'the wall that had divided him from his true otherness and possession was a web of dreams' (p.114). Such a vision symbolizes, ultimately, the healing and reconciliation of the nations after the dismemberment of the current era and the ultimate redemption or rebirth of humanity and thus fulfils the rebirth motif associated with the cycle of events which find their culmination in a carnival – the end of the old, the beginning of the new.

Such features in *Palace* as a cyclic process of renewal underpinned by the dissolution of the polarities of life and death in the motif of the processional of the dead crew who represent the parts of a cross-cultural whole; devices of grotesque representation such as the portrayal of character in intermeshed identities embracing more than a single individual and incorporating animal and human characteristics or aspects; the symbolic reversal of the roles of hunter and hunted, man and woman, colonizer and colonized; the widespread presence of sacrificial and regenerative motifs; and a sense of time that frustrates a linear reading of events – are all seeds of the carnivalesque which grow to fruition in Harris's later works.

Read in the light of subsequent novels in *The Guyana Quartet* and later phases of his work, this becomes clearer. The next novel in the *Quartet*, *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1963), is on one level a subversion or parody of Hindu and Islamic myth and involving

folkloric elements from the para-carnivalesque Hosay festivals common in the Caribbean (and especially significant in the festive life of Guyana) that could be discussed as a parallel instance of carnival in Harris's early work. However, the third novel of the *Quartet*, *The Whole Armour* – a work already read for carnivalesque elements by Joyce Jonas – forms a clearer instance of carnival as overt theme in Harris's early works and demonstrates Harris's preoccupation at this time with aspects of the festival in several of its implications.

The Whole Armour (1962)

The Whole Armour, like *Palace of the Peacock*, opens on the note of the dissolution of boundaries between life and death, dream and waking states – carnival conceits which imbue the narrative with a sense of fatalistic fantasy and 'alteration of proportions'. 'Abram dreamed he was crawling in a wood', the text begins, recalling, perhaps, the dark wood of the first Canto of Dante's *Inferno* (and other symbolic and literal forests of danger and transformation.) He dreams of a tree and 'the leaves of the tree turned into black swooping birds.... its roots spreadeagled in the air' (p.1.), an image which Jonas identifies with the 'inverted tree' of Vedic religio-cosmology.[8] The tree as cosmic-axis is a symbol widespread across the world. Related to the motif of the tree of sacrifice, an example of which is the symbolic use of the pine in Attic rites discussed in the first chapter, it develops into one of the primary images in Harris work, given fullest exploration in *The Tree of the Sun*..[9] The birds in the dream are mythological agents who carry an omen of Abram's approaching death, a prophetic message from the unconscious or otherworld prefiguring a column of crows which forms in the air soon after his actual death.[10] This mythic view of time in which events can cast shadows

before them in the world of dream is another aspect of carnival-time which develops throughout Harris's fictions.

A central premise of Harris's thought is that the symbols of the unconscious that appear in dreams, the visionary or poetic imagination and the myths that are the collective dreams of humanity are keys to reading the everyday experience of individuals and reclaiming or unveiling submerged identities. Furthermore, the exaggerated experience of dream life feeds into his carnivalesque representation of character. People are always represented as more than discrete individuals when facing each other. They are players in a tragi-comedy which is narrated with imagery informed by a myriad of mythic themes (a mode of representation recalling a long history of carnivalesque representation forms). References in the novel to the stage and drama, mask and masquerade, further attest to a fictional continuum in which the representation of character is underpinned by a collage of disparate facets knitted into carnival proportions. For Harris eschews tautology and dogma, often parodying religious solemnity and certitude, carnivalizing the sacred. Because the style of treatment and motive force of his use of myth and folklore (as this study argues) is carnivalesque, the flavour is one of experimentation and inclusion of diverse elements within a universalising pattern or framework, creating a tapestry or mosaic effect of 'altered proportions' and rather black, though not bleak, humour.

Jonas, in her reading, discusses the presence of the divinities of Voodoo – a religion born of slavery whose syncretistic treatment of Christian and African traditions epitomises features of the religious history of the Caribbean – and I would like to follow this suggestion here by looking at the way in which the personae of certain of the novels characters is underpinned by the Voodoo pantheon. Amerindian elements are also important for recognising a conception of character operating in and across cultural boundaries and will be touched upon in a discussion of the multifaceted identity of the novel's hero, Cristo.

An important mystery in this drama of tragic atonement is that of the nature and depth of guilt of its characters: it is a carnivalized morality play of sorts. The cast of *The Whole Armour* on the one hand derives from a subversion of biblical narrative through a

scrambling of the figures of Christian mythology. Abram is made into a symbolic sacrifice for his surrogate son Cristo (p.26), reversing the mythic configuration in the Old Testament where it is Abraham who is commanded by the Lord to sacrifice his son. Magda, as the mother of the fugitive Cristo, is a rewriting of the Virgin-mother with saviour-child motif: for she is a whore like her namesake Magdeline and her son the 'prince of hell' with the 'poise of a dancer' (p.16). Cristo's alleged guilt for, firstly, an act of murderous passion (for which he has become an outlaw) and secondly the death of Abram (who harbours him at Magda's entreaty) becomes in a sense like Christ's, the spectre of a universal sacrificial burden – for 'Nobody innocent', as Abram says (p.17). As in the dramatic productions of the Mediaeval marketplace, Harris's parodies of conventional belief subvert religious authority, but at the same time he uses humour as a vehicle for conveying a spiritual viewpoint and truth in its own right.

Cristo's mother almost convinces the young man himself of his guilt for the murder of her would-be suitor, although we read that Abram has merely keeled over onto the floor of his shack, overwhelmed by the shock of becoming embroiled in the upheaval of the hunt for this 'man-tiger' (p.18). At gunpoint she forces her son to don the clothes of the dead man as a masquerade in 'deathly rags' literally to 'save his skin', saying: 'You and Abram skeleton match in heavenself' (p.35). That this act is associated with a symbolic death and entry into the otherworld for Cristo, as masquerade in carnival celebrations implies an entry into other realms, other spaces, is evidenced by the crow of death watching quizzically over the 'transformation of the living and the dead and the compassionate alliance of the dead with the living.' (p.36) Although not materially blameworthy of what his accusers claim, Cristo nonetheless becomes stigmatized and vilified as the guilty party in an age old rite of scapegoating and ritual of substitution on the part of the community and local authorities (in the form of the jungle police): he becomes an unwitting 'Carnival' or symbolic sacrificial effigy.

Magda, the archetypal whore, is portrayed in mythic, sculptural and theatrical terms: 'sculptured....miraculous stone' (p.12) with a 'masked stare' (p.19) and numerous references attest to her sculptural dimensions and powers as an actress. Harris's use of

imagery also associates her with the wares of the market-place (an important locale in the history of carnival that becomes prominent in later works) in which she both plies and is plied by her trade. She tells Abram 'you like to feel you standing far away upon some high spirit branch like a bird falling every now and then to pick up a blind red pepper' (p.13) and her skin appears to the jungle policeman as 'taut like a grape' (p.38). Thus her bodily attributes suggest fruit and vegetable as well as animal and divine characteristics – a grotesque and carnivalesque continuum of parts. Described as 'queen of fate' in one of the ironic, carnivalesque inversions of the novel, she can in all her costuming, be compared to a carnival-queen who in the mundane world may be victim of sexual exploitation but whose sacred/profane function is to lead the processional of souls who have made her an object of adoration. For 'there was something superstitiously holy about this unholy woman.' (p.44)

In Haiti and elsewhere in the Caribbean the patron goddess of prostitutes is the African-derived Erzulie, embodiment of erotic love and mistress of everyman.[11] As a foil to the deification of female virtue enshrined in the adoration of the Virgin Mary, the homage aroused by Magda in the 'empoldered' Pomeroon community is a pagan bewitchment. Before her Abram is 'like a man in a helpless rigid dream', a reference perhaps to being uncomfortably suspended between life and death in the liminal zone of limbo, the condition of the zombie. When she violently crowns the lecherous Peet – whom Jonas has identified as the Afro-Caribbean god of the market-place, Papa-Legba[12] – for importuning her at the mock-funeral she is forced to stage for her hunted son, the man falls unconscious and in the dark mirror of the underworld perceives his oneness with all 'doomed flesh' (p.50-52). In this scene, one of many important funerals in Harris's work, Peet is forced to sacrifice his perception of himself as master of the woman. Magda casts him into limbo when she mockingly offers him her son's ripped shirt to cover himself saying: 'Don't tell me you frighten of you own skin.' Thereafter '[h]owever much he tried to mend a carnival conceit and glory it remained a basket and a sieve – crippled by the compulsive perception of the bizarre womb of Abram - out of which Cristo had been reborn and split. (p.55) Yet Magda's almost mythical power and

strength remains tragically yoked to the very conventions by which she is abused and dispossessed.

At the wake the Pomeroon folk consume the fruits of Magda's trade and gloat over her humiliation: a reflection of the everyday acts of prostitution through which Magda provides the menfolk an opportunity to expel their pent up sexual anger and frustration. Her zone of marginality corresponds to their blind-spot and this is also the basis of vicarious acts of substitution or scapegoating parallel in a way to those suffered by her son. Devices of mythic, folkloric and festive imagery subtly unmask a complex threshhold figure possessed of her own divinity underlying Magda's ominous yet oppressed role. She lies between worlds: 'an hermaphrodite of the species' (p74) and 'enormous jungle cat' (p.73) as well as goddess of fraught transcendence for her clients. In the novel's configuration of personas, it is apparent that the visage of human fallibility and finally tragedy is at the same time represented as a comedy of the gods - not as distant manipulative entities, but as indwelling divinities. Magda, though realizing a degree of empowerment and even divinity remains a prisoner of harsh circumstances and according to Maes-Jelinek is numbered among those Harris has described as the uninitiate.[13]

She is juxtaposed with the virginal daughter of Peet, Sharon, the 'snow maiden' and 'Pomeroon milk' of the land, but the two women are curiously bonded, even paired in a form of 'carnival twinship' (p.73-74). Sharon herself is put on symbolic trial with Cristo in the collective mind of the community for being the Circe who has led three men to their deaths. She is, according to Magda, 'a fickle treacherous bitch' (p.77) who presides over what Mattias, her lover (another 'dummy' or 'Carnival' who is stabbed/sacrificed by her father and his friends at the wake) describes as: 'the fabulous injustice of universal nightmare' (p.66). Her pursuit of a private 'erotic fable', the desire for, in Magda's sarcastic words, a 'Pomeroon fairy tale to come true' (p.77) is an innocence that in its effects connotes its own paradoxical guilt. To the community she takes on a terrifying aspect as the 'witch' who consummates her love with the tiger-skinned Cristo in the forest – like Tristan and Isolde, Robin and Marion and other outlawed lovers, on the fringes of the human (p.78). Even the intimacy of their touch is

couched in terms that (whether consciously or not) evoke the rites of rustic carnival processions in Europe undertaken by boys representing the cohorts of the dead: 'the tiger roaming through the trackless paths, rapping at every jungle door, calling to the sweet meat belonging to the dead sleeping flesh of the night.' (p.82)

This initiation, in which Cristo is 'striped with all the mystery of the female touch of night' (p.82), complements the transformative ritual he undergoes during his forty days and forty nights on the run in the bush (an obvious parody of Christ's sojourn in the wilderness). While in flight he encounters or hallucinates a mysterious cavalcade of Arawak tribespeople – who are part of a Carnival staged by a local Catholic mission, Sharon suggests (p112) – which appear like an army of the dead to conduct him through his initiatory rite. Like a novice entering into a mystery religion or Saturnalian reveller slashed with *februa*, he suffers what can be viewed as ritual lashing and symbolic wounds by tiger's claw or 'a long vicious blade of razor grass, sharp as a bloody Carib's knife. My chest was all incision, beaten, I tell you. Decapitated.' (p.117). Through this experience, though, Cristo is connected with the indigenous life of the continent and transformed. He is later taken in by the medicine men, revivified and initiated into manhood as wounded shaman (p.127-28) – a figure who simultaneously suffers the stigmata of suffering humankind and holds the promise of healing and recovery[14]: a theme which in *Armour* is couched in terms of the fertilization of the possibilities dormant within the post-colonial morass in which its characters struggle.

The skin of the tiger Cristo kills and dons as a disguise to return to haunt the Pomeroon community as he prowls after Sharon has a parallel in a story of Heinrich Boll's *The Lost Honour of Katherine Blum*. V.V. Ivanov, in an essay where he discusses carnival as a literary motif, describes how 'the criminal is chased by police and helped by the heroine to escape. His disguise as a sheik is motivated by the carnival'.[15] In *The Whole Armour* the tiger skin functions as a fetish to mark Cristo's transformation from hunted to hunter. Peter Stallybrass, discussing Robin Hood and the carnivalesque, argues '[r]eversals, are, of course, structural in the tales of the outlaw who is both hunter and hunted.' He goes on to cite other carnival characteristics of the popular hero which are

applicable to Cristo. 'Robin Hood, like the plebeian rebel, is also hunted as an outlaw, and so he is equated with the very creatures which he hunts. Like them he must use craft, disguise and flight. Thus the relation between the misrule of the outlaw and the rule of authority could be rewritten as the relations between animal and human.'[16] It is in recognition of his attainment of warriorhood through slaying the tiger that haunts the folk in the novel and his ritualistic assumption of its skin, we can guess, that Cristo is charged with the erotic and procreative virility associated with sacrificial/fertility rites which precedes his shotgun yet sacral wedding with Sharon. He gains a somewhat ironic legendary aura. 'One day it would become the legend of the new schools of the heartland – how Christo had killed Abram's tiger and the lovely striped feminine skin of the devil was the coat he now wore wherever he went.' (p.83)

The skin also marks Cristo's assumption of his mythic guise: that of the man-tiger of Amerindian mythology. In European mythopoetic tradition this incarnation corresponds to the numinous creature of Blake's *Songs of Experience* and Yeat's millenial 'Christ-the-tiger'. Through his masquerade Cristo furthermore comes to incarnate the Amerindian Kanaima, a shape shifting deity capable of animal metamorphosis held in fear and loathing by Pomeroon folk and thus, by implication, the atavistic, animal forces (tiger) which the law purports to control and eradicate. 'The Kanaima in Amerindian folklore' Gregory Shaw informs us, 'is the one who is compelled by the primitive Indian law of Vendetta to retaliate a wrong or injury'[17], a motif which operates in reverse upon the tigerish scapegoat Cristo. His assumed identity positions him perfectly for the role of 'sacrificial substitution', 'carnival', or universal victim in face of the community's unconscious dread. For as Girard has written: 'sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding. Its vitality as an institution depends upon its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based.'[18]

The community acquiesces, if uncomfortably, in his destruction in superstitious maintenance of its own beleaguered collective existence, in an archaic pattern which recapitulates the rites of sacrifice in pre-Columbian times when the Ware-Jaguar (god of rain and fertility) demanded human blood in return for the gift of the waters of life. The

events of the novel hinge on an almost infinite series of rites of sacrificial substitution by which hunter and hunted exist in a form of mutual deadlock and fear displaces guilt onto the head of a single representative. The novel demonstrates that now, as then, 'Mankind itself was the tiger.'(p.72)

This identification of humanity with bestial attributes or animal shadows is a carnivalesque trait which appears in Harris's fiction as a necessary counterpoint to his frequent assertion or instatement of human divinity, what Blake called 'the Human Divine'.

Through their love, Cristo and Sharon point to the possible rebirth in the spirit and the revivification of dismembered cultures. As Cristo tells Sharon, 'we've begun to see ourselves in the earlier grass-roots.... We're reborn into the oldest native and into our oldest nature while [our parents] are still Guyana's first aliens and arrivals' (p.108). Maes-Jelinek comments that symbolically, 'the potential community is now in Sharon and Cristo'[19]: they have become the ancestral body as well as children of the future. Their union is described in terms of the coming of the rains and the revival of nature implied by that, although the vision they share is somewhat frail. 'The stern winter of hardship had yielded to the spring of fertility but the roots and branches of the transformation descended and arose only in the starred eye of love.' (p.93) Through the act of 'self surrender' (p.98), Cristo in Abram's shack – like Christ in the garden – becomes an archetypal or universal sacrifice as he waits head in Sharon's lap, half-conscious that the soldiers/police are gathering around. 'The thought [of sacrifice] laid hold of him with a flitting hand that belonged to carnival as well as to the tragical spirit of place, ancient and modern masquerade, Christian and pagan disguise, the fluctuating grimacing sorrows of all mankind.' (p.118)

To Magda, who has given herself to a district officer in the vain hope that her son will be saved, this is the final betrayal, a 'filthy whoring trick'. But the realistic reading or purely material version of events, of brutal death in a derelict world, is given a redemptive dimension. Sharon's pregnancy and the synchronous birth of Cristo's son to her three months before the day of his father's hanging forms a regenerative trope that

affirms value in the sacrifice. This does not mean to say that Harris is endorsing the ritual of scapegoating, but that through it can be glimpsed a transcendental element of truly sacrificial love. Furthermore, the son remains as a symbol of the lover's ideal of a regenerate world, even an invocation of it. An image of the universal mother and child related to that at the close of *Peacock* remains to challenge the appearance of sovereign loss in the execution of the father. For through Sharon and her child the thread of human generations, the earthly reflection of the tree of life itself – for all that it is a tree or tapestry of sacrifice – is intact.

The Secret Ladder (1963)

In the final novel of the Guyana Quartet, *The Secret Ladder*, the impact of the world of the dreams and of the dead; the role of apparitional figures of the flesh and of cross-cultural myth; the enactment of ritualistic sacrifice in an atmosphere of carnivalesque upheaval; and the celebration of a cycle of renewal are vividly present. These elements are shown to be a locus of insight for the government surveyor Fenwick, who commands an expedition up the Canje River into the Guyanese interior. Fenwick must spearhead a reconnaissance mission (reconnoitering the the area for a possible hydro-electric project) up a purgatorial river network infested with threatening natural forms and disturbing human remnants as well as maintain his hold over a rebellious, mixed crew. Conflict arises with both the inhabitants of the catchment basin, with the crew and from within when Fenwick finds himself possessed of his own mutinous instincts. The carnival without is matched by a carnival within. Fenwick grapples for control against a truth which the crew-member Bryant articulates at one moment: 'Primitive mankind is, pure primitive.' (p23)

In the folklore of the Caribbean, as for 'primitive' societies in general, dreams are treated as warnings or injunctions sent by the gods or ancestral spirits.[20] As messages

whose source is in the other- or spirit-world, these communications from the deep are themselves carnivalesque agents which overwhelm the scrupulously erected dikes of the conscious mind, suggesting both the presence and the possible resolution of psychical and communal conflicts. Fenwick suffers from a 'flood of half-waking fantastic thought breaking through the sluice-gates of every ordinary sceptical grain and self-imposed precaution' (p.32). Such manifestations from the ancestral spirit-world haunt him with a caveat and source of identity in rivalry with his official post. As for the engineer Roi in the 1968 novel *Tuma-tumari*, the matter of ancestry complicates the man's rule over the semi-mutinous crew. As an authority figure with an official post, his emerging sympathies, furthermore, run the risk of carnivalizing his ominous role of reconnaissance for the catchment basin and overturn his rule when rebellion threatens amongst the river dwellers.

Although *The Secret Ladder* does not deal with carnival overtly as *The Whole Armour* does, one can read the entire novel – with its narration of a symbolic seven day cycle at the beginning of September (Spring in the Southern Hemisphere) in which the forces of authority and apparent anarchy clash – as chronicling a period of misrule in which buried (or 'eclipsed') ancestral and mythic facets of being (carnival conceits) threaten to topple sovereign or imperial conceits of reality in a cycle of renewal.

The River Canje, as with rivers in other novels of Harris's, is a primary nexus of image structures within which human protagonists vie for survival and at least the dregs of philosophical meaning.

> Fenwick had named his dinghy *Palace of the Peacock* after the city of God, the city of gold set somewhere in the heart of Brazil and Guiana. He liked to think of all the rivers of Guiana as the curious rungs in a ladder on which one sets one's musing foot again and again, to climb both the past and the future of the continent of mystery....
>
> It was one of those inward flowering truths that kept him spiritually alive....
>
> The Canje was one of the lowest rungs in the ladder of ascending purgatorial rivers, the blackest river one could imagine. (p20)

That the river possesses its own mythic identity as (on one level) a river of purgatory downstream from the City of God recapitulates the points made in my reading of *Palace of the Peacock* regarding Harris's animation, or reanimation, of the natural world in his fictions in repudiation of the hierarchy of being established by European colonists. A living enigma, the river poses itself as a constant source of challenge and potential threat to those who ply it for their living. The riverbank territory is painted as an arena of confrontation between enigmatic principalities: latter day colonising authority in the guise of economic development and technological advancement and the mystery of the past and future of a continent.

The contradictory dictates of Fenwick's experience are summed up by his dream of the horses which he encounters at the edge of dreamed savannahs. Firstly, a rider appears out of the conjunction of two trees spied in the distance, armed with 'sword or spear'. Fenwick sets out to greet this mythical figure surrounded by 'a lively body of horses', but on approach the horseman vanishes to be replaced by 'a white decapitated mare, prancing on the ground vibrantly amid her companions.' (pp.32-33) Like a work of fiction, a dream is an open-text: what does the rider signify? The conquistador (armed with sword) or an ancient tribal figure (armed with spear)? Does he come as an allied aspect of Fenwick or as mythical combatant? Is the rider's transformation into the white headless mare symbolic of the violent conflagration wrought upon the region by the conquistadorial spirit (and its modern day analogues), an emblem of sacrificial dismemberment, or is it an apocalyptic omen...? In this case the answer lies in the unfolding of events.

The augury of Fenwick's dream and premonition is answered in the charged encounters between him and the old descendant of a runaway slave holed up deep in the river-country. The horses in Fenwick's dream become the mournful beasts met as he and the crew member Bryant make their way through the Bush to Poseidon's hut, intent on ferreting out resistance to their work and mission. Poseidon, with his incongruous Hellenic name, is a twist to the ancient Classical theme of the runaway who becomes a king of the sacred wood.

> Rumour had created a tortuous and labyrinthine genealogy for Poseidon, the oldest inhabitant of the Canje. His grand-father had been a runaway African slave who had succeeded in evading capture and had turned into a wild cannibal man in the swamps, devouring melting white cocerite flesh wherever he spied the mirage of the high banking land; feasting on the quivering meat of the sensitive turtle (until he turned to human jellyfish himself) as well as the soft underbelly of fearsome alligator. (p.21-22)

His primitive and bestial attributes no doubt allude to folkloric tales of the hinterland as Cristo's tigerish qualities refer to the Kanaima; he also suggests in several respects the figure of a carnival masker. On the one level of the humblest oppressed origins, possessing 'the tragic lips of an actor, moving into comical association with a foreign dubbing', Poseidon nonetheless also appears as 'the black king of history whose sovereignty over the past was a fluid crown of possession and dispossession' (p.22-24). This enthronement illustrates the reversal of authority and kingship themes of carnival. The 'old man of the river', rumoured to be possessed by the spirit of his grandfather (a superstition reminiscent of African belief in the spirits of the dead entering close relatives after death), is a symbol of the Black man's arrival in the New World after journeying through the underworld of the Middle Passage. Although his creole confounds Fenwick, his presence speaks eloquently and provokes passionate questioning on the part of the surveyor and the black crew member Bryant.

Fenwick, himself mixed blood, retains only a snapshot of his father, 'a dark man of vivid African descent'. His mother is 'half French, half English. Her skin was like a fair East Indian's shadowed by night-black wings of hair. It was rumoured that along with her European stock she possessed a fraction of Amerindian blood, as well, and that her grandmother was as Arawak as her husband's grandfather had been uncompromisingly African'. While for Bryant the old man provokes an intense sense of ancestral linkage (p29), for Fenwick he becomes, like the Canje, 'a bottomless gauge and river of reflection' (p.23). Despite the surveyor telling himself that in the figurehead of the rebellion amongst the river-dwellers 'here was no god of the swamps, no leviathan of the

depths' (p.24), Poseidon nonetheless inspires, provisionally, a 'revisionary' hope for a new dispensation through a reversal or revolution of premises. 'The blinding ancestral apparition of Poseidon contained a new divine promise, born of an underworld of half-forgotten sympathies. And yet who could tell whether it was not the old monster of deception everybody secretly feared in themselves.' (p32) Poseidon as a symbol of liberation, therefore, has a passing resemblance to figures such as Chaka Zulu, Toussaint L'Ouverture and other heroes of black history, but his principal significance lies in inner realms. He assumes a numinosity one associates with figures of the racial or collective unconscious, the 'underworld', in keeping with the extreme reverence accorded to ancestors – the old or the dead – in the African homeland as local divinities in their own right. He is represented, through a carnivalesque transposition of features, as both a decrepit human remnant and a god of the deep unsettling the sediment of privileged or ruling assumptions.

The mapping of the river undertaken by Fenwick in *Ladder* engages the theme of cartography, a science which conventionally operates on the premises of a structural grid ill-equipped to do justice to the curvilinear nature of space. In several passages the novel satirizes an experience common in the New World that in New Zealand, for example, manifested itself in maps which superimposed the grid pattern of city streets over steep hillside locales, creating untenable plots and in buildings designed in England being erected so that they faced away from, not towards the sun. Such absurdities are a metaphor for a whole range of colonialist fallacies. Fenwick, for instance, observes a similarly mistaken perception fostered by air reconnaissance of the river-basin: 'The nature of the error grew plain when one traversed the flooded savannahs (out of which the headwaters of the creek were supposed to start) and found instead the continuous, strict bed of the creek, its subtle current wreathed around one's chest....' (p.41) A condition widely recognised to be conducive to the eruption of carnival in its urban settings is the existence of a formal grid (such as the French Quarter of New Orleans) within which people are periodically moved to assert their desire to turn the ordered, everyday world upside down. By contrasting the cartographic grid against the carnival forces represent in

the novel by the river, its inhabitants and the fluid, if tempestuous, realities they inhabit in the period of misrule chronicled, the reader can perceive a similar process occuring in the novel.

Mapping the interior can be viewed as a metaphor which is multivalent both in and *for* the novel. The cartographic endeavour is, like the 'reversible' motif of the quest for El Dorado in *Palace*, a meta-fiction that is undermined or subverted on all levels of the work, including the nature of the author's fictional explorations in the dark wood or equatorial jungle of human experience and the reader's own progress through the text. The jungle taken as a symbolic theatre of human intercourse reminds one that the relationship of dependence of people on nature makes the wilderness *not a neutral slate open to the imposition of human designs, but a living enigma.* One can quest for unsuspected equivalences which bespeak structure (carnival inversion or otherwise) within chaos but the text like life can never be emptied of meaning. However, the exploration and mapping associated with cartography undergoes an evolution in Harris's fiction that increasingly collapses the boundaries between art and science and culminates in the metaphors of the text as painting, architecture, sculpture and music.

Within the jungle communities of Canje and its environs, women occupy a position similar in many respects to that of the eclipsed descendants of slaves. The plight of Catalina Perez, who, significantly, takes up residence in Poseidon's dilapidated 'hut and asylum' (an old Catholic Mission house in the jungle, still crowned with a symbolic cross) is practically that of refugee. Her husband, the crew member Perez, beats her cruelly and she lives in fear of being gambled away at any time for the pleasure of one or other of the rough team. Her survival depends on a form of prostitution and to the mercenary store-keeper of the expedition, Jordan, Catalina appears quite plainly to be 'the picture of a whore' (p.79) Like Mariella and Magda she is cast at the fringes of a male dominated culture that is nevertheless in pawn in certain respects to its own unconscious projections upon women – 'everyman's mercenary whore' (p.116) extracts a compensatory fee.

The riddle of 'the designing theatrical figure of the prostitute' (p.71) and the psychology of prostitution emerges as a thorough-going portrait which runs throughout Harris's fictions. The representation of Catalena in her terror at first meeting Fenwick and Bryant when they reach Poseidon's hut is a variant on the shock of confrontation between any authority and marginalized species of humanity.

> Her appearance seemed almost unreal as if it might even be unintelligible in such a place and circumstance; her eyes were startling blue-black set in a livid distracted face which seemed to flicker with the shadow of long intense eyelashes. Indeed so black and so sweeping they accentuated everything she did with mechanical regularity like the frightened manifest of a living doll. (p.69)

There are several carnivalesque features of Catalena's characterization; for example, the last phrase in this description carries the metaphor of the voodoo doll which in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is employed by Jean Rhys when Rochester attempts to overlord his wife Antoinette by renaming her 'Marionette', as if to say in the theatre of the world men pull the strings. The marks of Perez's lashings and Catalina's vulnerability are all too apparent at the same time that her 'unnatural bloom' gains her a certain hypnotic ascendancy over Bryant and perhaps Fenwick. Yet '[h]alf-Priestess, half-prositute' (p.454)[21], she encapsulates an irrepressible drive for self-determination in the very chains of captivity and through the reversals of fortune and comes to symbolize a form of anarchic freedom.

At the close of the novel she is almost raped and murdered in the rising tide of violence surrounding Poseidon's strange martyrdom. Preceding his death a crew member, Chiung, is knocked unconscious by Canje men during his night watch. Although the incident is related in a vein of theatricality and humour, it augers the breaking out of hostilities between the 'camps'. These facts remind us that carnival time, insomuch as this reading has identified the events of the novel with a carnivalesque cycle, is also a time of violence and licence with a continual threat of rape and murder in the air. In defending Catalena from Poseidon (the old man believes her to be spying on the 'rebels', and furious, makes to strike her down), Bryant unwittingly slays his idol who goes down 'as

if the horse had kicked him until he fell bleeding under her.' (p.117) In the wake of his death 'God was dead.' (p.114) The conspiratorial river-dwellers, having seen their figurehead slain and lost their hope for salvation, deflect the blame onto Catalena in a gross act of scapegoating. The 'sentence of repudiation they wished to pass on to the woman and on themselves' (p.122) perfectly illustrates of the principle of ritual substitution mentioned earlier. In this case, the psychology of sacrifice demands that a victim be chosen to appease the outraged ancestral god. Fate, however, intervenes at the last moment in the form of Fenwick – who thus takes on the mythic guise of a Perseus rescuing Andromeda from the hydra-headed serpent of the riverfolk[22] – and the danger is averted, giving

> time for Bryant and Catalena to appear and run and make swift love on every trail across the earth; while Fenwick grew to believe they had put their foot and escaped upon another rung in the secret ladder. The land was the mystery in which he would never chart where they had vanished.... (p.125)

Bryant and Catalena vanish like Keat's Porphyro and Madeline and the closing mystery is the transubstantiation wrought by erotic love: one which is constellated in Fenwick's mind with the unpredictable mystery of ancestry, a continent, and himself. At the end of the novel, after an emblematic carnivalesque period of seven days of re-creation in which all certainty has been overturned and new imperatives asserted themselves, the questions remain: has the need for a reconstitution of the material world part and parcel of every festive celebration and renewal been fulfilled?

> Seven days it had taken to finish the original veil of creation that shaped and ordered things to be solid in the beginning. So the oldest fable ran. Perhaps seven, too, were needed to strip and subtilize everything. Seven days which would run in logical succession in time but nevertheless would be appointed or chosen from the manuscript of all the spiritual seasons that had ever been. Each choice - drawn from its claustrophobic epoch - would be a sovereign representative of its age, and all would be strung together like a new immaterial genesis and condition. (p.74)

When Fenwick wakes 'on the seventh day', it is perhaps to *les triste mardi-gras* that in the end is a new beginning or renewal of another enigmatic, tragi-comic cycle. The sense is similar to that possessed till the last by the ghost of the historian Henry Tenby in *Tuma-tumari* : the inscriptions of nature remain to a degree unreadable: they cannot be fathomed within the circumscribed context of the cartograpic (or historical) text. The carnival of experience continues to turn the calender of human fortune and woe like beads in a rosary. A redemptive outlook comes from being able to respond to the terrible beauty of the greater design.

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Having briefly surveyed three novels of *The Guyana Quartet – Palace of the Peacock* for proto-carnivalesque elements, *The Whole Armour* or its treatment of carnival as a theme and carnivalesque qualities features, *The Secret Ladder* as a work embedded with general carnivalesque features – some comments can be made about the role of carnival and nature of the carnivalesque in this early phase of Harris's works. In *Palace of the Peacock* an emblematically multi-racial, dead crew or waterbourne procession of the dead ascend a spiritualized river. The conquistadorial authority of its leader is overturned through the uprising of the mythical woman they pursue and his death at her hands. The characters in this narrative are all to varying extents multivalent, merging into each other and having material existences underpinned by both animal and divine identities. The themes of wounds and sacrificial death, along with their natural counterpart, rebirth and resurrection saturate the novel.

This is also true of *The Whole Armour*, but whereas in *Peacock* the essential elements of carnival and carnivalesque representation are largely undifferentiated in the text, the later novel explicitly engages carnival as a central event which is connected to rites undergone by its 'hero'. Comic element reside in the fundamental relationships of the

novel through which the drama of human existence comes to take on significance as a microcosmic enactment of a play of the gods or divinities – whose cast is informed by strands of African, European, and Amerindian folklore – which provides the basis for a sort of cross-cultural sacred or divine comedy of existence. Such a carnivalization of the sacred directly reflects the festive outlook at carnival-time through which ordinary folk take on mythic or archetypal guises in an inversion of everyday structures and celebrate the interpenetration of life and death. The last point is reflected in this, as in all of Harris's fiction, through a dissolution in the novels of the *Quartet* of the boundaries of life and death. Not only do the dead swim back to life, but the living themselves can inhabit liminal zones such as a world between sleep and waking or the underworld. Such elements are part of a larger vision of 'altered proportions' informing Harris's writing, reflected in characterization and other representational techniques which create a collage-like blending of influences as well as relativization (carnival's 'gay relativity') of cultural elements.

Both *The Whole Armour* and *The Secret Ladder* chronicle rites of sacrifice acted out (or intended) by communities with more or less violent intent whose internal fissures – in the context of their troubled roots and ongoing poverty and desperation – lead them to engage in atavistic practices common, with variations, across cultures. Such behaviour also mirrors the practice of ritual sacrifice in ancient times (whether the crucifixion of Christ, dismemberment of Osiris, Amerindian ritual, or middle-passage of Anancy) and therefore locates the tendency to scapegoat, to elect a 'Carnival', in cross-cultural dimensions of the human psyche. In life of the festival itself, this dark history leaves its imprint in the potential for violence which carnival time carries. However, the texts also show how mythic elements in these same practices can be excavated and seen in a transformative light; such as the rites of initiation, sacral marriage and ritual death undergone by Cristo who points towards 'rememberment' of cross-cultural tradition.

A mixed crew emblematic of the latent potential of multi-racial elements figures prominently in *Ladder*, prefiguring the pay table across which crew-members face the surveyor Frank Wellington in the later novel *Genesis of the Clowns,* which I will discuss

in chapter four, where the tension between authority and anarchy is made the centre of an overtly carnivalesque treatment. The rebellion under the figurehead Poseidon is a 'period of misrule', but the more fundamental carnivalesque process occuring in the novel is the overturning of fixed and conventional boundaries and assumptions provoking questioning and growth on the part of the novel's protagonist – an overturning, furthermore, reflected in such narrative devices present in the text as the animation and sacralization of nature. The prospect of cyclic renewal is salvaged from the visage of catastrophe, a metaphor of renewal native to carnival that can also hold for arts of creative fiction.

This is only a partial and provisional reading of carnival and the carnivalesque in three of the first four of Harris's novels: one which nevertheless points to both the manifold nature of Harris's carnival and the open possibilities of interpretation. It is generally understood by critics that Harris's works operate as an ongoing opus and many of the elements engaged in this chapter need to be read in the light of following chapters for their full significance to emerge. Carnival, though, is clearly an important concern and source of inspiration for Harris from the earliest works and this is reflected both as an explicit theme and implicit dimension in *The Guyana Quartet*. In the next chapter related themes are traced through novels which, more directly and intimately concerned with artistic form, attest to an ongoing concern with the festival and witness to a development of the carnivalesque as a facet of Harris's revolutionary approach to the art of narrative.

Notes

1 Interview with Alan Riach, Riach and Williams (ed), 1992

2 'Carnival and Creativity', Hena Maes-Jelinek, in Gilkes, 1989, p.47

3 In Voodoo, *les mystere* are refer to the nature of the gods and spirits, possession by them, their presence in the sanctuaries dedicated to them.

4 Maes-Jelinek, 1976, p.20

5 'The civilisations of pre-Columbian America' by Crispen Ticknell in Toynbee, 1976

6 A theory of reincarnation drawn from Tibetan mysticism forms an informal parallel in the realm of the cross cultural imagination that can illuminate the process by which Donne and the others come to a point of self-recognition, integration and transformation: rebirth and renewal. In the *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, an ancient treatise and sacred text on the art of dying and not being reborn on the earthly plane, it is recounted how after forsaking the body there is a phase of post-death experience in which the soul of the deceased must confront the masquerade of the so-called Karmic Apparitions. This consists of the manifestation of a series of divinities, peaceful and wrathful, which are the subtler forms of those forces which have informed the carnival (Tibetan divinities are often represented through masks in religious ritual and festivals) of one's life experiences. Thus, one relives the crossing of the *sangsara* (waters of illusion or desire) of life as symbolic content, rather than ephemeral form, in a series of hallucinatory visions. During this time the soul reviews the karmic lessons of life and passes judgement on itself. The Tibetan Book of the Dead or After-death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, W.Y.Evans-Wentz, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957. p67, 101-105. These ideas resemble the Orphic mysteries inscribed by Plato in the tenth book of the *Republic*, and have parallels in many Mystery traditions.

7 'Recapturing Heaven's Glamour: Afro-Caribbean Festivalizing Arts', Robert Farris Thompson, Nunley and Bettelheim, p.29

8 Jonas, 1990, p.35

9 The glyph (a recurrent motif in Harris's fiction) appears in Judaic iconography, too, where it signifies the primordial source from which the cosmos eternally springs. The World Tree or Tree of Life also implies the crossroads of -- or gateway between -- worlds used by shaman, through which the soul may journey between realms, underworld and overworld. See The Tree of Life: Symbol of the Centre, Roger Cook, Art and Imagination Series, London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, p.69

10 The belief in dreams as communications from the otherworld is general, but c.f. Voodoo in Haiti, Alfred Metraux, translated from the French by Hugo Chateris, London: Andre Deutsch, 1959, p143-5.

11 Divine Horsemen: the living gods of Haiti, Maya Deven, London: Thames and Hudson,1953, p.143

12 Jonas , 1990, p 38. C.f Peet the 'conjurer' who has spent years of hard labour against the bush' (p46) with '....The Haitians....say that he is an old peasant who has worked his fields hard all his life and is now at the end of his powers. When he possesses a person, the limbs are crippled and twisted and terrible to see.' Also, on the subject of Peet's relationship to the divinity of Legba, Maya Deven says: 'The God of the Cross-roads himself approaches the Cross-roads, and already in the dark mirror of the nether regions appear the first dim outlines of his inverted reflection....' Deven, 1953, p99

13 See Preface, Maes-Jelinek, 1982

14 See the argument of Shaman: the Wounded Healer, John Halifax, Art and Imagination Series, London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.

15 'Carnival as Inversion of Opposites', V.V. Ivanov in Carnival!, Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), Approaches to Semiotics Series No. 64, New York, Mouton Publishers, 1989, p.20-21

16 '"Drunk with the Cup of Liberty": Robin Hood, the carnivalesque, and the rhetoric of violence in early modern England', Peter Stallybrass; (ed.) Armstrong and Tennenhouse, 1989, p.61

17 For a discussion of the tiger in The *Whole Armour* as the Kanaima of Amerindian folklore see 'Time of the Tiger' by Gregory Shaw in The Uncompromising Imagination, Ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek, Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1991. p106-107

18 Violence and the Sacred, Rene Girard, translated from the French by Patrick Gregory, London and Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1972; 1977, p.5

19 Jelinek, 1982, p.38

20 See Metraux, 1959, p.143-45

21 The 'x' following this page quotation signifies that it derives from the 1985 republication of *The Palace of the Peacock*, *The Far Journey of Oudin*, *The Whole Armour*, and *The Secret Ladder* as The Guyana Quartet'. Curiously, the paragraph to which it belongs appears neither in the first edition nor in the subsequent one volume paperbound republication of *The Whole Armour* and *The Secret Ladder* by Faber and Faber in 1973

22 In Greek mythology Perseus saved Andromeda from the anger of the sea-serpent to whom the Ethiopians had offered her, after being told by an oracle that they would be thus freed from menace. Harris has himself drawn attention to this undercurrent: see 'Recovering Precious Words' by Michel Fabre, ed. Maes-Jelinek, 1991.

III

'A Limbo Stage'

The four novels following *Heartland – The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1965), *The Waiting Room* (1967) *Tumatumari* (1968), and *Ascent to Omai* (1970), can be seen to comprise a series in Harris's fictional works, an informal quartet. The title of this chapter – 'A Limbo Stage' – lifted from the novel *Ascent to Omai* has been adopted to emphasise both the sense of void prevalent in these novels but also their movement towards a 're-memberment' of cross-cultural material and development of innovative fictional forms, a symbol for which, used commonly by Harris, is the limbo dance.

Alan Riach has described these novels as comprising 'the second phase of [Wilson Harris's] work, a central cycle to do with loss and void and absence'.[1] While this is true for elements of Harris's works in general, these fictions closely portray their characters' suffering and tribulation in the throes of both nature's inscrutable workings and the crucible of an era of breakdown and disintegration. Personal vicissitude and social and cultural upheaval create a ground of uncertainty upon which characters struggle to orient themselves. A fluidity of emotional and intellectual response, a ceaseless revising of assumptions towards the formation of radical new, cross-cultural perspectives and the attainment of spiritual repose emerge as solutions to the brittle world of appearances. In *Tumatumari*, especially, language itself seems to crack under the strain, breaking into a train of seemingly anarchic associations. There is, generally speaking, less to laugh outright at in these novels than those of *The Guyana Quartet* or later works, though there is a redeeming gallows humour, especially in the carnivalesque elements (such as the reversal of personae - judged and judge) in *Ascent to Omai* .

The sense of fracture and fissure in these works comes from both the intimate light in which the forces of personal and cultural dissolution are viewed and the often tortuous experimental narrative techniques Harris employs. Jelinek comments along these lines on the importance of 'the subjective imagination, its working on memory, and its transformation of the raw material of life. Experience in these novels is wholly internalized.'[2] Each text is presented in either diary or related 'confessional' form (complete with doodles in *Omai*) and they function like slates upon which their fictional authors seek to organise the fragments of their experience into meaningful patterns. Harris does not capitulate to 'sheer nihilism', therefore, but strives to affirm the value of sacrifice in history with the consolation of regenerative tropes. These narratives constitute an integral phase in the evolution of his approach to the novel, sustaining and deepening the tendency in *The Guyana Quartet* towards subjective or symbolic representation of character, event, time, life and death (and so on) with decidedly carnivalesque features and they reward the reader in many respects.

This phase could be described as one of 'cold carnival' within the opus of the author: an unflinching depiction of human nakedness and vulnerability within an epoch that shatters the assumption of social costuming or roles. It is the increasingly sophisticated scale of artistic execution, Harris's far-reaching quest for new, accomodative narrative forms, linked to his search for responses to the condition of the post-colonial world (where authority has been decentred if not dethroned) that gives significance to the developing use of carnival and use of the carnivalesque. The narrative devices and strategies met in the novels correspond to the author's conviction that increasingly human survival depends on mutual recognition rather than antagonism between polarized individuals and cultures. In the same manner in which Harris's critical and philosophic writings address the hell-gate of the Middle Passage, for all its trauma, as ultimately a 'limbo-gateway' into the syncretic diversity of the Caribbean world, these novels reconstitute or recycle the dross of disillusionment and decay into 'a species of fiction' that in terms of content and stylistic execution open new vistas for the art of the novel.

The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965)

The Eye of the Scarecrow is a 'drama of consciousness' set both in Guyana's jungle-interior and its capital, Georgetown. In this novel (as is true for the other works discussed in this chapter) an evolution occurs from the nature of the carnivalesque features present in *The Guyana Quartet* involving especially techniques of characterization increasingly abstract that include the blending and collapsing of discrete identity, a contortionist depiction of time and involved treatment of the theme of sacrifice and its revivificatory dimensions. The diary of a nameless narrator (henceforth 'Nameless') who sets out in the years 1963–64 to reconstruct his Guyanese childhood, adolescence and manhood, the novel is a testament to the transfigurative effects of the imagination on the remembrance of the past.

> The fact is I find myself conferring a curious baptism of the living imagination upon helpless relics, relics which thereby lose their smothering or smothered constitution and character. For if I were to attempt to confine or draw an exact relationship or absolute portrait of what everything was before the stroke fell and created a void in conventional memory, I would have succumbed to the dead tide of self-indulgent realism. (p.15)

The contrast between 'the dead tide' of realism and 'a curious baptism of the living imagination' within the medium of a reconstructed diary and chronicle is similar to the overwhelming of the cartographic text by the fluidity of the river environs (and the unconscious forces it can represent) looked at in *The Secret Ladder*, but involves a more experimental appreciation of time. This prefigures the complete subversion of the realist historical text by timeless symbols in *Tumatumari* and creates a visionary appreciation of reality with definite carnivalesque features.

The supernatural 'stroke which fell and created a void in conventional memory' and which ushers in the sense of carnival time which characterizes the treatment of events in the novel was Nameless's vision in 1948 (the year of the waterfront strike) of his friend L–; whose face the narrator perceives to be crossed or transformed by the spectre of an 'incredible scarecrow' (p.14). This bizarre 'silent thunderclap' creates a sense of displacement that reverberates down the years so that Nameless finds himself incapable of recalling 'the identical map of place which was shattered in a moment' (p.15).

The emblematic scarecrow itself turns out to be the major character of the novel. Amongst Harris's carnivalesque stock-characters, who reappear across his fictions, the scarecrow is an idiosyncratic creation whose full significance is elusive. Furthermore, he (or it) is a collective or transpersonal entity as much as an individual, appearing not just within (or posing as) various characters but *between* characters. This representative figure is visible, on the one hand, in the dying governor of the colony whom Nameless watched in his childhood, 'less like a living man than a shirt cast over branches of rib and bone' (p.29) – reminiscent of Yeat's 'An aged man is but a paltry thing/ A tattered coat upon a stick' – as well as in the wretched figures of the tenement houses owned by Nameless's father (p.29). The scarecrow's features can also be discerned in the face of nature, settlement, history and time itself; as witnessed by Nameless at one point reflected in Water Street Canal, Georgetown, in language which contains the carnivalesque polarities of runaway slave and stranded colonist:

> ....the hanged trespasser within the sentence of place, the broadcast of an ancient execution and runaway design. It was an parallelled vision of seed and fruit, the saddle of history and the captive of nature, recollections of one who shared the severance and unity of ancestral master and slave. (p.24)

As such the Scarecrow hints at the starkest, most skeletal constitution of human nature and the human condition, the 'skull beneath the skin'[3]. The quality of anguished inner contemplation recognisable in this most enigmatic of Harris's characters, furthermore, can be identified with a trait of shamanic initiation or initiatory rites in

general (including those of carnival). Carlo Ginzburg, discussing the genesis of dismemberment/recomposition rites in archaic Eurasian society, refers to 'the anguished inner itinerary via which the shaman recognised his vocation: the experience of being cut to pieces, of contemplating his own skeleton, of being reborn to a new life.'[4] The scarecrow's initiatory, effigy-like, and sacrificial status in the carnival of events which unfolds in the novel is also resonates through later fictions – in *The Infinite Rehearsal* , for instance, the narrator muses over 'the apparition of the numinous scarecrow, the numinous victim'.[5]

Another of the 'numinous relics' transformed through arts of memory or imaginative mnemonic techniques, linked to the apparition of the scarecrow, is the funeral procession with hearse, a fundamental recurring carnivalesque image or motif in Harris's novels. The reconstruction of events in 'carnival-time' is illustrated by the depiction of the procession held for the martyrs of the strike:

> And it is along Water Street, a mere trickle of legend in 1948, that a funeral procession returns to my mind's eye like the beginnings of a swollen flood in the world of 1964. The anonymous light but tragic spring of the dead moves secretly and steadfastly across every continent in every falling raindrop. (p.17)

Here the art of recall is overtly connected to the return of the dead. The grotesquerie of the 'poor man's hearse' which haunted Nameless in his childhood as he walked the streets of Georgetown, furthermore, provokes a meditation into the carnival dualities of life and death, which transcend all social strata, in search of a pattern of relief outside of the strait-jacket of history. 'One found oneself peering, as a consequence, into the heart of the universal carnival for the grimmest redeeming clue of an open memory' (pp.18-19).

'Here the "universal carnival",' Jelinek writes, 'not only means the 'carnival of history', but already evokes a universal 'comedy of existence' such as Wilson Harris was to create in his latest novel (Carnival).'[6] It is as if in the 'carnival of history', the phenomena of the strike, funeral procession and carnival cavalcade have been overlaid to create the effect – or vision – of a river of souls and bodies thronging through the streets

of Georgetown.[7] The strike itself is a 'period of misrule', a carnivalesque reversal of authority and a carnival cavalcade is metaphorically, as evidenced in the first chapter, a return of the dead. The posthumous view countenanced by the narrative, then, relativizes the tragedy of life and death with a perspective which is beyond or unfettered by the grave. In accordance with this the hearse-riders of Nameless's childhood recollection, who had astonished him with their cavalier attitude, are seen 'laughing and joking', providing a 'merrymaking bread of sustenance....witness of a mutual and living god' (p.20-21).

On a folkloric note, the apparition of the hearse-riders at the 'crossroads of history' corresponds to the role of the ebullient Barons of Haitian folklore who malinger at crossroads under the command of Baron Samedi or Ghede, the lord of death and *les mysteres* – whose symbol is 'the cross upon the tomb'.[8] In Voodoo the recycling of the souls of the dead through their ritual invocation in the *tonelle* means that their passing away cannot be viewed as a total loss: they return to instruct or serve the living. George Lamming uses the tonelle in *Season of Adventure* (1979) to bring into play elements of repressed folk consciousness represented by the heroine Fola, presenting an alternative to the authoritarian and divisive ethos of the dominant culture. A similar process of invocation is at work in the very fabric of *Scarecrow*, through which the dead past is transformed or converted into a source of awareness, inspiration, even celebration. A carnivalesque reading of events, as an alternative to that dictated by the dualistic, 'journalistic' frames[9] of recorded history, as well as providing a form of black comedy, posits the spiritual possibility of a meeting and ritual reconciliation of the poles of life and death, poverty and wealth, past and future. It is from the soil of history that rebirth takes place.

An example of how novel representational techniques can be used to witness to the 'mutual and living god' or divine essence dis-membered to be re-membered or revivified throughout the text is manifest in the face of breakdown and loss portrayed in the tears of the narrator's mother for his step-father (who was lost in the interior at Sorrow Hill).

> Only yesterday it was I was stricken, frozen with astonishment, when I caught a glimpse of my mother's face in the mirror looking like the face of an impossible shadow. Yet it was she, I reminded myself. My step-grandmother and grandfather were addressing her in an ominous persuasive tone and she was weeping bitterly and hollowly, the tears streaming helplessly down her cheeks to mingle like beads of glass in the reflection of her hair. Her fleeting distraught appearance was that of someone in process of being devoured by and in process, too, of devouring a strangled sensation of love. (p.41)

In the last chapter we saw how the underpinning of personae with mythic identities in Harris's writing textually reconstitutes human reality on the plane of a play of divinities, contributing to the sense of carnival proportions in the novels of *The Guyana Quartet.* Developing this vein, the above passage describing a bereaved woman's grief can be read in the light of characteristics of the primary aspect of the Voodoo goddess of love, Erzulie, a reading which enables us to recognize the manner in which Harris's representation of persona collapses the distinction between human and divine identities.

In her *Maitresse* aspect, for which she is also known as Erzulie Freda Dahomey, Erzulie is the Tragic Mistress whose quintessential condition of being is to weep for the loss or failings of love. Maya Deven describes this manifestation of Erzulie through states of possession suffered by her devotees:

> Inevitably then – and this is the classic stage of Erzulie's possession – she begins to weep. Tenderly they [her devotees] would comfort her... But it would seem that nothing in this world would ever, *could ever*, answer those tears....But whether the raging tears of Erzulie Ge-Rouge, or the despairing sobs of Erzulie Maitresse, this weeping is so inaccessible to reason that one thinks, inevitable, of a child's innocence of reason.[10]

The devotee who experiences possession by Erzulie in this aspect suffers her peculiar stigmata in a condition matching that of the narrator's mother. Translated into terms of fictional representation: the narrator's mother in the above scene recalls the stigmata of

Erzulie and thus becomes the symbol of an immortal, sacrificial condition. This designation is especially apt for 'the wounds of Erzulie are perpetual: she is the dream impaled eternally upon the cosmic cross-roads where the world of man and the world of divinity meet, and it is through her pierced heart that "man ascends and gods descend."'[11]

The carnivalesque theme of sacrificial dismemberment, in the form of both emotional breakdown and physical dissolution, is epitomised in the tangled knot of events surrounding the murder of Hebra (prostitute of the mining town whose name she bears), an act for which the emblematic Scarecrow is scapegoated. Nameless and L–, now in young manhood, journey to Sorrow Hill in the interior, the surroundings of which stimulate a play of their differences. The narrator is developing an acute sensibility for nature in its own right and haunting sense of the supernatural, while L– maintains the mechanical instincts of an engineer. Hebra, whom each seeks to possess, brings them into jealous opposition at the same time as they are curiously yoked together as her pawns. The woman is cast as no simple victim of the act of bloodlust enacted upon her, but a 'jagged daughter of cloud' with a 'black mask of a face' who rises between them (p.56). As in the novels of the Guyana Quartet, there is a ambivalent force embodied in the figure of the prostitute that constitutes a problematic carnivalesque reversal of status between exploiter and exploited.

> It was the most difficult trial and conviction for me to begin to accept the unpalatable truth that we – who sought to make her our plaything – were her maternal joke as well (twins of buried and divided fantasy) and that a price was about to be placed on our heads....' (p.52)

That this 'unpalatable truth' must be faced by the characters of the novel reflects Harris's unwillingness to accept the polarization of victor and victim, slaver and slave (and so on) in history as 'absolute stasis'. It is only through recognition of the interrelated, even mutual, tendencies which bring about such an impasse, he is saying, that stasis may be overcome. Therefore, 'Hebra was equally a grotesque substitute - as repulsive as every appearance of conniving victim - for the timeless contradictory spouse they (victor and

victim) both needed whether they were rich man or poor salesman, customer, artist or engineer' (p.85).

The reference to the two men as 'twins' (a clear instance of 'carnival twinship') has a basis in the identification between L–'s true father, rich Anthrop, and Nameless's father, who both perished in the Bush, yet the term has more than simply naturalistic connotations. The third and final books of the novel dissolve into a series of obscure reflections, 'items of reconstruction' and confessional passages in letter and diary form. Part seven of this series, for example, begins: '[i]t was a strange company -- TWO and IT -- though who *it* was no one could say: a crumbling scarecrow perhaps, the key to...?' (p.75) The numeral two appears to refer to L– and Nameless, *it* the scarecrow of their collective guilt (yet paradoxical innocence) with his single staring eye.[12] The lines of individual identity are blurred or even dissolved to combine the twin aspects of murderer/murdered, victor and victim – with the Scarecrow appearing to be the *representative and carnivalesque representation* of a spirit which fulfils the age old 'sacrificial need in - and of - humanity' (p.83). For in taking upon himself the confessed guilt of 'Idiot Nameless' and consequently suffering execution as murderer, he becomes like Cristo in *The Whole Armour* an archetypal effigy or 'Carnival' as well as redemptive figure. 'But would not someone always be found - in the midst of the 'dead' seal and ransom of everything - to subscribe - without even knowing how or why - to the living mutilation of the scarecrow?' (p.83)

Tumatumari (1968)

The role of the mask and, especially, its relationship to sacrifice is a central theme in *The Waiting Room* (1967) that is taken up again in *Tumatumari.* Here a similar principal of the compounding of layers of identity within and outside of individual personality is manifest: the relationship between personality and identity is encapsulated in the symbol of the mask and its role as both instrument of disguise and revelation. These themes and techniques are linked, furthermore, to carnivalesque representational forms, such as certain dramatic conventions, though in an indeterminate way. Chronicling the trials of Prudence, a allegorically-named figure[13] who suffers a nervous breakdown, the novel opens with her encountering the ominous '"black" head of sun' (p.13) in the Orinoco River: a death-mask representing her late husband and still-born child. The narrative is a testament to Prudence's fight to make sense of her tragedy in the light of her entire life, the history of a nation (Guyana) and the caprices of the 'the Great Game' of existence in the cosmos itself. Will her disaster lead to fatal despair or integration and recovery?

The imperative for Prudence to come to terms with death's mask and the nature of the events in which she has been embroiled is revealed in her stunned reaction to the indifferent or resigned response of her husband Roi and his mistress Rakka to the death of Rakka's mother. Prudence has had a relatively sheltered Georgetown upbringing under the paternalistic wing of her historian father and the miscarriage of events in the interior constitutes a challenge which is like the 'mask of the sun.... staring with pointed eyes' (p.10) at her. She must plumb the ancestral body represented by Rakka's mother; emblematic of the obscure folk as can be seen in the following quotation where a representational device of 'altered proportion' conflates Rakka with Guyana's indigenous population and its carnivalesque extremes. 'The old woman's eyelids turned to stone: lapis of populations within whose sombre flame now shone - highest and lowest - the chalice of purification and the begging bowl of humanity.' (p.22)

Roi, Prudence's husband, had stood in an ambivalent relationship to the 'vanquished Indians of the sun' (p.33) with whom he shares half his blood, wearing a

'self-depreciating mask' (p.25). He struggles uneasily at a threshold between the legacies of the past and future of antagonistic cultures. But in his gamble for control over the Indian labourers necessary for his project of bringing electricity to the region of the falls, he becomes both king and clown in a play of values. 'It was an ancient play (circus of half-forgotten childhood) whose clown gained a new dimension...' (p.25). Roi himself wears the 'mask of the well' (p.25), the question-mark hanging over the land which can become a vessel of insight, but he plays a 'clown of realism' (p.26) in the 'circus of the sun' (p.26), chosing to adopt an alien set of criteria for reality and progress. While the Indians may seem to him 'blockheads of myth'(p.33), their appearance at Tumatumari Falls is a profound omen as well as paradox which must be addressed. He recognises that his 'precious scarecrow brood' of conscripted labour represents, like the Indian processionals returning to haunt Caribbean and South American carnival, 'the conscience of our age' (p.35) as he tells Prudence. Although, like Donne with Mariella, he tries to rule them like a 'herd', and to manipulate their sacred 'ceremony of the rock' – to aggrandise himself in their eyes into mythic ruler – his attempt to become 'lighthouse' to the region in fact runs the risk of turning him into a 'scapegoat' (p.36) or 'Carnival' in the ancient game of 'Huntsman and Hunted' (p.32)

As Prudence makes her descent into the 'well of identity' (p.41), a metaphor for her nervous breakdown in the wake of post-natal depression and grief for her husband, she becomes spectator of and participant in the mysterious 'PLAY OF THE ROCK – the passion of Roi's Indian's under the heavens.' (p.49). The reference to 'the passion' recalls the passion-play, a Mediaeval dramatic convention in which, among other elements, Christ's emblematic wounding on behalf of humanity is reenacted for the audience. In *Tumatumari* the natural landscape, the 'theatre of the mountains' (p.50) itself, is the setting for a re-enactment in Prudence's mind of Roi's hunt for the wild boar of the rapids (on a mundane level, in search of food for the camp), which was in fact his ploy to gain ascendancy over the Indians. It becomes the stage upon which a trial of the soul and sacrificial rite is enacted. Roi tells Prudence:

'If all's to prosper they need someone to wear the mask of the sun - to hunt (as tradition has it) the game of the rapids.....'

'Midsummer madness', cried Prudence.

'Call it what you like', he was now beside himself. 'The death of the old king. Not that I am old. The birth of a new creation. Christ knows what that really means.' (p.52)

A central theme of the novel is the value of sacrifice to 'the birth of a new creation', – a phrase linked to the concept of renewal at carnival time – and the meaning of its ritualistic enactment across cultures, by both ancient and modern communities. Like the benighted Wasteland of the Grail Sagas, '*The whole land mourned for the birth of sacrifice*'. (p.101) Yet the nature of sacrifice is ambivalent. It appears as an intractable pattern of self-deception in humanity as well as a genuine need. It is the Indian's lethal 'fire of the sun' with which Roi plays in his bid to bring electricity to the region, for, and here the narrative sounds a prophetic warning note, 'would they be content with a "symbolic" portrait of the conquest of the falls or were they already steeped beyond recall in a tragic rehearsal of the death of the "mad" Midsummer king, the engineer of the rapids?' (p.54) Ironically, as Roi returns from his enactment of the liturgy of the hunt victoriously with 'the boar's head wreathed in flowers like a necessary violation of cultures' (p.55) – an almost Attic emblem of initiation – this symbol of sacrifice augers his own beheading by a rock in the rapids of Tumatumari Falls. The mask he has adopted claims his life.

Prudence's father, Henry Tenby, is closely paired in 'carnival twinship' (along the lines of an Electra complex) with her husband. Tenby is cast as a 'dying animal' with a 'bogus historical mask' (p.62) who has nonetheless entertained in his innermost recesses the desire for a 'treaty of sensibility' in the throes of unjust cultural exchange. His respectable Georgetown family life and academic posturing are uncompromisingly stripped aside to reveal the dirt and dust. Among his crimes of hypocrisy have been his exploitation of the 'waif of the streets', an Amerindian prostitute paired with Roi's mistress, Rakka, and his acquiescence in his wife's refusal to allow the most visible

throwback to their African (and Amerindian) roots, their son Hugh, to surface on social occasions. Consequently Tenby has resigned himself to a rigged existence.

> It was this underlying sardonic flux which played the tune to which the world all unsuspectingly danced, since it carried the suspension of all models in its fold – skeleton in the cupboard – Ceremony of the Rock – barren womb. (p.66)

Having capitulated to convention and effectively rendered himself impotent as a player in the establishment of the treaty he desires, Tenby stakes the hopes on Prudence as the agent of a new or renewed awareness.

Prudence's symbolic descent into the well conjures a transpersonal and visionary reality, encompassing her experience and that of others as well as past, present and future – historic and timeless – features. Book Three, entitled THE CHAIR OF THE WELL, is a whirlpool of impressions and connections which dramatises the reconstruction of Prudence's vision after the shattering of her illusions. The material world is turned inside-out through the representation of experience in mythic and imaginative terms. Thus the luminary of day becomes the 'C-A-R-R-I-A-G-E O-F T-H-E S-U-N', a reference, perhaps to the Greek myth of Phaeton whose punishment and fall parallels Roi's. Her vision of the 'horseman of the well' (p.79) is revelational, drawing her to an appreciation of the 'pricetag of the unicorn - profoundest immersion in and yet dispossession of rules - rules of the flight of the game - rules of the sun-god, wild boar or eel.' (p.80) The progress she makes is towards the penetration of masks into a subjective and visionary core of events, personalities, natural and supernatural forms. She recognises Roi, for all his tags upon himself as hunter and engineer of the rapids as a 'CHILD OF THE SUN' (p.81), whose true worth lay not so much in his perceptions of himself, as in the carnivalesque cultural extremes he encapsulates. He was:

> Doomed she felt: to collide - to be decapitated like an outworn model. To be sublime however - a forerunner - an outrider of storm, fool of remorse, rapids of history. For the pith and love of his sun lay in illumining a

structuring of relationships - highest and lowest equivalence across the brow of his age. (p.81)

'THE DEATH AND FUNERAL PROCESSION OF/ THE KING OF THE SUN' (P.83) witnessed by Prudence, like the multivalent phenomenon of the funeral procession in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* is a primal and transpersonal vision of the correspondences between events and things. Accomplishing a resolution of apparently sovereign poles, the description of how '[t]he great procession - river of all ages - paused in awe at the phenomenon it beheld' (p.86) is an abstract, fluid and spiritualized depiction of the theme of death in life and life in death that is reminiscent of Blake's illustrations to Dante's *Divine Comedy* with his drawings of streams of souls caught in spiralling eddies. A significant element in Prudence's vision, mirroring Harris's, is the *reclamation of the animal as well as divine in nature and human nature* from its unjust conscription to imperial or mercantile ends. Roi's conceit of a 'comedy of manners' (p.86) appear as the zoological 'bars' of an age which is subverted and through which emerges 'the political conscience of the race, centaur, half-man, half-god.' (p.86) In Prudence's vision the conceits with which humans distinguish themselves from their animal shadows are erased so that a carnivalesque physiognomy of the race emerges: 'Half man, half-horse. Half-man, half-dog. Half-man, half bird. Half-man, half-fish. Endless self execution in the name of substance, diet of origins' (p.86). Such a grotesque appraisal of the human condition – grotesque in the true, carnival sense – is posited as the necessary sacrifice of self-deception.

Similarly, Harris's work asserts, racial inequalities need to be repudiated before there can be the establishment of a common ground, a greater community of humanity through a recognition of a shared, though fraught, inheritance. 'For it was out of this womb of inheritance – out of this trampled canvass, profits of hell, victor and victim, battleground of the sense – there marched the long funeral procession of the black slaves of the sun.' (p.90) The overturning of the stasis of oppression into the carnival of relationships involves a reversal of premises, insight into the exploitation of species by

species, races by races, how, in the language of the carnivalesque: 'there were times when a pound of meat was sweet to buy for a blind man's penny in the marketplace of heaven. Bitter times in the market place of hell where it stood like a husk of ivory, rich man's tiger of gold.' (p.92).

Henry Tenby's own posthumous re-entry into the 'Brothel of Masks' called 'FACE LIFT' where he had enjoyed his Amerindian courtesan is simultaneously his descent of the *Staircase of the Well*, the lifting of his masks. There archetypal Rakka, 'Damned whore of the past and future', reveals Henry to himself as the 'Barren fiend – guardian of consciousness – sculpture of the Dead, the Unborn' that he was. In the rehearsal of the death of his outcast son, Hugh Skelton ('skeleton in the cupboard'), it is shown how through pawning his sensibilities and colluding in the effective banishment of his racially mixed son from inclusion into the fabric of his family, Tenby prostituted his true muse of poetry and protest, which led to the symbolic seizure of his tongue by the waif of the streets and the years of ensuing metaphoric dumbness. For in actuality the 'Sum and son of all his hopes - *Hugh Skelton...*' (p.120) died anonymously on the streets, unmourned until the vantage-point gained from beyond the grave. Through this insight the ghost of Tenby is able to be of use in communicating with his daughter Prudence, unfettered as he is now of his veneer of false assumptions, instructing her in a 'play of truth' in what is yet another variation of the carnival theme of the return of the dead. This act of posthumous guidance also anticipates the role of the Virgillian spirit-guide Everyman Masters in the novel *Carnival*.

Among Tenby's belated insights comes a repudiation of the 'classical grotesque'. Tenby's 'classical grotesque', akin to the 'comedy of manners' Roi had adhered to all his life, can be identified with the fictional forms the ascendancy of which matched the decline of the carnivalesque in European culture and rise of bourgeois and puritan propriety.

> 'The thing to remember', he said seeing her distress, 'is that classical grotesque may bind but it yields in the end - climax of remorse. Frontier of

> conceptions. Building within a mask, mask within a mask, extrapolative ruin, visionary formation, weakness of space.' (p.125)

These views complement comments from throughout Harris's career which repudiate the classical realist or classical grotesque [novel] in favour of alternative forms such as 'carnival tragedy' and 'carnival-epic'. Through such a 'THEATRE OF CONVICTION' or inner trial as is undertaken by Tenby and other characters in *Tumatumari*, then, Harris strives to bring into being not only an appreciation of the 'reality of sacrifice' (p.131) but a *regeneration of artistic form* through a carnival 'epic of the ancestors' (p.133).

The novel, despite its apparently defeatist conclusion with Prudence's suicide, offers through the medium of a renascence in the arts reflected in its innovative fictional forms the possibility of an integration of the anarchic energies released at the core of the clash of individuals and cultures, culture and nature in the post-colonial world, through a 'deflowering of masks'. The very disturbing fact of 'nature not upholding one's masks' (p.152) and the consequent play of values which emerges between the characters in the novel and their historical and timeless setting is seen as covertible into the vital 'art of compassion'. This art promises the possibility of evolution through 'the emergence of a genuine open dialogue with truncated figures, half-man, half-earth, half-river, half-sky, half-history, half-myth stretching into the heart of a continent.' (p.138) In this light the cruelty of the hunt (for gratification, for resources) and the sacrificial wounds of humanity are revisualized in a true 'comedy of values' as opposed to conventional and static 'comedy of manners', part of the on-going initiatory process of 'the Great Game'. It is not, however, until later novels that the comic proportions of this come to predominate over the pathos and sometimes turgid narration of this phase of Harris's work.

Ascent to Omai (1970)

In *Ascent to Omai* Harris achieves to a greater extent than in any previous work the overturning of the conventions of 'classical realism' or the 'classical grotesque' that he indicts through the creation of new carnivalesque form for the novel. Victor's symbolic ascent of a mountain in the Guyanese interior (which is simultaneously a *descent* into Omai chasm) that dominates the novel begins on a surreal footing. He glimpses the ghost of his dead father who appears as miner, scarecrow, ruined porknocker, 'Patron saint of the watershed and 'Constable of the Watershed - in short 'saint and executioner.' (pp.10-16). The mountain and chasm in which Victor was 'beheaded ages ago' are a symptom of the 'stigmata of the void' (a favourite phrase of Harris's that encapsulates Christian, Hindu and Buddhist notions in a symbol of sacrificial wounds 'in the body of space') which Victor, with his 'clown's grimace' (p.17) must plumb. This is attempted through a carnivalesque faculty of vision and carnivalesque mode of representation governing the entire novel:

> [t]he art of apportioning one's parts within a global wound, irreality. The sliding scale of death. Dead today and alive tomorrow. The marriage of grotesque relations, doctor and patient, judge and judged, life and death, past and present... Victor resumed his funeral march towards the watershed. (p.17)

As one metaphorical instance of such wounding, Victor has been bitten by the Tarantula – a guise of the African spider-trickster god Anancy and the name of a limbo dancer later encountered in Albuoystown (p.25). The importance of Anancy to Harris's fiction has been widely recognized. Gilkes concisely describes his significance when he identifies Anancy with the figures of the trickster and shaman: 'the spider-figure of West

Indian/African folklore who traditionally acts as the agent (the catalyst) initiating a new state of conscious in a *rite de passage*'.[14] Like the shamanic initiation of Cristo in *The Whole Armour*, Victor's emblematic wounds also have a revivificatory function as a '*Spider transubstantiation*' and '*Trickster transubstatiation*' (p.26) under 'the dreadful healing eye of the gods, mask of poison' (p.26): a motif functioning much as the 'pointed mask of the sun' did for Prudence in *Tumatumari*. As is true of all Harris's fictions, the dramatic (psychological, mythological, carnival) forces with which Victor must struggle are incorporated into the physical environment of the Guyanese interior which becomes conflated with an interior psyche and stage and its contortionist-like propensities: 'the looming chasm of the river acquired an agility to scale mountains. Larger-than-life scale. Limbo dancer.' (p.26)

In *Ascent to Omai*, as in all Harris's novels, theatrical imagery is fused with the natural and human environment to accomplish the conversion of landscape and cityscape into a stage upon which human figures become carnivalesque representations. 'The curtain parted upon a stage whereon his play SOUL was in progress. *Porknocker's Boudoir.* Theatre of Adventure.' In the 'porknocker's boudoir' Victor had witnessed his father Adam and a 'fancy lady' cohabiting on the floor as he hid in the emblematic fortress of his dead mother's petticoat. His memory of these childhood scenes, extending throughout his ambiguous life (it is uncertain by the close of the novel whether Victor is dead or alive) become 'curtains of comedy. War paint. Love paint.' (p.28) They also become fused into the grotesque of the brass-bands and limbo dancers of Albuoystown which he vividly recalls having watched as a child on the street through the 'window of the twentieth century'....

> ....the rowdy band of Albuoystown. He pulled himself up - *there they were*: Rowdy elements, descendants of 'free' men and 'slaves'. Apocrypha of the living and the dead. Insurrection womb and race. Dance of ironical victor and victim. Strong ageless women dancing on stilts in waistcoats and trousers (high up – off the ground – in the sky); and great limbo men in striped drawers and dresses sliding under a bar. Inverse location of sex. Door of rebirth. Sanctification of otherness.... (p.30)

This passage is a sort of carnivalesque manifesto which contains many significant images and themes, notably: the performers as descendants of slaves as well as freemen (theme of the runaway); the relation of the living and dead in 'carnival time'; the pairing of polar opposites ('victor and victim'); images of gender reversal (androgyny/hermaphroditism/transvestism); and the motif of the limbo bar or pole as a gateway through which the painful experience of the Middle Passage is converted into new arts of community ('sanctification of otherness').

Comments made by Harris in which he recalls witnessing such performances in Guyana as a boy in the 1930's explicate his understanding of the importance of the limbo dance as a folk form and symbol of cultural revivification whatever its political uses or abuses.

> *Limbo* then reflects a certain kind of gateway or threshold to a new world and the dislocation of a train of miles. It is – in some ways – the archetypal sea-change stemming from Old Worlds and it is legitimate, I feel, to pun on *limbo* as a kind of shared phantom *limb* which has become a subconscious variable in West Indian theatre. The emergence of formal West Indian theatre was preceded, I suggest, by that phantom limb which manifested itself on Boxing Day after Christmas when the ban on the 'rowdy' bands (as they were called) was lifted for the festive season.[15]

In its application to the arts of creative fiction, as much as the development of national theatre in the Caribbean, perhaps the prime element here lies in the '[s]anctification of grotesquerie.' (p.30) What appears at first as a bestiary of bastard elements Harris sees as the material out of which to bring into being a regeneration of artistic form.

The necessity of excavating cultural inheritances, as Sandra Drake recognised, is central to the carnivalesque in Harris works in general and to *Omai* in particular. This excavation is vital to the process of the development and self-recognition of each of the characters in the emblematic TRIAL in which the welder Adam is sentenced for his alleged arson attack on the factory in which he was exploited, but which transcends the courtroom

and becomes transposed upon the symbolic ascent of Victor. Victor had lost not only his father but the scholarship his promising intelligence had earned him at school, and disappeared on the day of the trial never to be seen again. However, in the 'comedy of the soul' in which he revises events as an adult, even this dereliction has its redemptive features.

> (Victor) felt his eyes being welded too, soldered too by frustrated divinities (copulation of idols – Africa, Asia, Europe) so that as the dancers swept by on the holiday street – shape changing, shape-shifting in a dream – he perceived them through a veil of profanity, a veil of sanctity, man/woman, holiday/holyday, father/mother.... (p.32)

Such a perception carries an intimation of the renovation of artistic form through a revivificatory sense of carnival proportions by which the raw material of a shattered humanity may be stitched into novel tapestries of 'complex wholeness'. Victor must indeed immerse himself in:

> [the] bitter question of confronting legacies of the past in which all men were involved through parent or friend, employer and employed, trader or trade, captor and captive etc, etc. These legacies – extending into time and eternity – could assume all sorts of proportions, apparently unfeeling raw material as well as apparently feeling unity. (p.45)

Among the carnival legacies of the past, present, and future to be addressed are the ancient vestiges in the cultural inheritance of modern Guyana, set against the transmutations of industry and technology wrought by white, so-called post-industrial, society. Elements of African and Amerindian animism, for example, filter through the novel to alter the bias in the West and its representation of reality of making firm distinctions between animate and inanimate objects. Thus attributes of human nature and the supernatural are blended with the world of things creating a carnivalesque 'theatre of the robot' (p.41) The trial of industrialism and mechanization itself occurs with 'an assumption of painless comedy enacted everywhere – the crucifixion of the robot.' (p.41).

The black comedy and carnivalization of the trial also includes animals anthropomorphically represented – or human roles represented by animals – such as a parrot acting as orderly and an appearance by Odin's ravens. 'There was suppressed laughter in the court - equation of comedy. 'Is it sacred or black comedy?' asked the judge of striped cat, parrot and raven drawn on his pad.' (p.64)

This blending of human, animal and 'inanimate' entities is redolent of Bakhtin's comments about Mediaeval carnival in which the 'collective ancestral body of all the people.... the unfinished broken body (dying, bringing forth and being born).... [is] not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries, it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects.'[16] Thus among the witnesses at Victor's fathers trial are 'Alias Tin (born in Alleyway of Bread), Alias Copper (born in St. Saviour's Churchyard), Alias Wall (born overlooking the river), Alias Picket (born in Albuoystown diametrically opposite Alleyway of Bread.' (p.43-44) The members of this bizarre 'queue of the underground' are said to have 'all sprung equally from the spear in Victor's side', implying, it seems, the extent to which the human race has suffered the violence of an eclipse at the hands of its own creations. In this vein Alias Tin is described as: 'a strange holy/unholy compound.... reflected there dressed in a meteor, clown of divinity, idol of humanity: claim of bloodlessness: claim of blood.' (p.47)

Yet in the 'dance of the soul' enacted beneath the symbolic ' limbo ridgepole: limbo door of rapport in fortress of memory' (p.48), constituted by Victor's psychological individuation, a 'comic duality of function' emerges which can accomplish the 'repudiation of the robot' (p.49). Possibly the key to this lies in the withdrawal of projections which pawn humans to industrial and technological fetishes and a recognition of the state of the world under industrialism as a reflection of a malaise of the human soul. The theme of the dance and also music as mediums or vehicles through which to realize a reconciliation of opposites, transcendence of earthly travail and celebration of renewal is a common one in Harris's writing that will be explored at greater length in the next two chapters of this study.

The representation of character as existing within a continuum, rather than in the traditionally distinct units of realism, is perhaps the most vital move on Harris's part towards 're-membering' a broken legacy, however and is at its most significant in the portraiture of the opposing personae of judge and judged as extremes of a shared human predicament, partial rather than absolute identities. The process by which 'Victor now saw the judge sitting there was himself' is accomplished in this remarkable sentence: 'He (Victor) toyed now with a writing pad upon which he drew the outline of a novel history (his father's trial) through the witnesses he (the judge) had interrogated forty years ago.' (p.52) Consequently the narrative perspective shifts from Victor's to that of the judge who had sentenced his father and who (years later, on a plane flying over Omai as Victor makes his ascent below) wrestles emotionally with the issues which were at stake. 'He felt himself and the prisoner now truly in the same abnormal ill-defined dock as the prisoner' (p.53).

The attainment of this revisioning of relations between people beyond the 'masks and manners' (p.55) of an entrenched post-colonial society and those between humans with the world in general is set against the backdrop 'of the enormous residue of empires, pre-Columbian, post-Columbian' (p.56) of South America and the globe. Thus the welder Adam appears to the judge with revisionary hindsight as the mythical gilded-man, El Dorado, of the ancient Americas. The tendency of the apparently rational modern-day court to scapepgoat, 'to institutionalise the victim' (p.60) as a mechanism of 'sovereign fear and collective security' (p.61), is read in the light of pre-Conquest patterns of mythic and ritualistic sacrifice for which the Aztec, Inca and Mayan civilizations of South and Central America are infamous. Harris has indicated on a number of occasions that he considers this obsession with sacrificial rites to be a chief cause of the 'failure' and downfall of South American civilizations.

Adam's maladjustment, leading up to his alleged crime, is presented by defense counsel as stemming from his apprehension of the stasis of victor and victim in history:

> There were the lucky ones who feared and loathed the unlucky have-nots they refused to admit it because, in effect, they (the haves) saw their

> accumulative fortunes as fundamentally arbitrary and ornamental which they needed to collectivize into a god of worth. There were the unlucky have-nots who hated and idolized the lucky haves though they refused to admit it because, in effect, they (the have-nots) saw their condition as fundamentally sinful and ugly which they needed to justify within a scapegoat – waxworks of the baboon. (p.65)

The question arises in the trial as to whether an 'omen of grace (p.67) can emerge from this such 'a state of besieged or besieging soul' (p.68). Defense believes so, seeing in the 'rubbish heap of images' of Adam's poem, 'Fetish', read to the court, 'a new experimental source of wealth.' (p.72). Thus behind the 'welder's mask, persona of the factory' in 'the slave market of technology', in the phenomenology of the victim, is to be found 'a fantastic kind of pentecostal masculine/feminine brooding light, charisma of motherhood (MAGDALINE), flux of fatherhood (CHRIST), voices within voices, lamentations and blues, Negro/Jewish/Toltec/American/African/European etc., etc.' There is the possibility of discerning, therefore, to paraphrase the authorial judgement of the novel, a 'sacred comedy' (p.82) in which 'all roles were interchangeable - judged, judged, victor, victim, Adam, etc., etc. as parts of a broken legacy and translation of history.' (p.83).

The judge's growth towards a realization of this art of 'translation' is augured in his consideration of the syndrome of scapegoating enacted by the ancient Mexicans. This illustrates the points raised above regarding ancient behaviouristic patterns which form parallels with the institutionalization of the victim in a modern court of law. The judge reflects:

> The Mexicans – precisely because they wished to conscript time on a material base – were drawn every fifty-two years by their fear that time had to be manufactured afresh or it would slip from their grasp forever.
>
> Thus they seized on a victim – on flesh and-blood as the fortress or factory of time – and tore the living heart out as from a stuffed rabbit. Then by firing this base they greeted the bank of the sun as a new dawn, newly minted time. (p.85)

The mention of Ancient Mexican sacrificial rites reveals again a deep-seated concern with the phenomena of sacrifice and scapegoating as institutional or economic ritual enacted across cultures and diasporas.

However, as usual in Harris's work, the sovereignty of death (literal or symbolic) by scapegoating or otherwise, is challenged. Often it appears as a source of insight, a mere transmutation of energy. A near death experience where Victor is almost turned under the wheels of a car on Albuoystown's streets, for example, brings him into lightning communion with the ancestral dead of the continent, so that, in an unconscious state, he keens: '[s]omething to do with the buried tongues of consciousness, African, Manoan ancestors, limbo dancers of Albuoystown, the masked dead of several continents and centuries who passed his door on holidays and and holy days....' (p.91) The dead return to unearth buried cultural heritage, heretical insight. Of the possible lives or deaths of Victor left open by the close of the novel, there is rumour that he had set sail upon the ship *Osiris*, a clear metaphoric reference to the rights of passage or travail entailing a subsequent reassembly of parts suffered by the Egyptian god of the underworld and resurrection. Osiris, we read, is 'a remarkable omen signifying the barren living (feuds of the living) and the fertile dead.' (p.103)

In 'seeking to balance primitive fetish with Christian omen' (p.103) the latter part of the novel drops the realistic mode entirely and gives way to a carnival of dialogues. Sailor, Rose, and Alias Copper discourse with the humour of the docks and of Jonkonnu street performance. Tarantula the Omai dancer is present (p.106) and among the 'equations of the dance' is the pregnancy of Rose (formerly Victor's girl) to an unknown Sailor whom she has slept with in lieu of Victor himself. Believing her lover dead dead, she thus recapitulates Isis's impregnation of herself with the 'phantom limb' or phallus of Osiris. This is an omen of the continuation of 'remembered' community after the dismemberment of the Middle Passage and its ongoing equivalences in terms of human slavery and sacrifice. However, the trend towards carnivalization of event means that these scenes exist in non-exclusive fames of possibility and dialogues mentioned above can equally be

read as a repartee between Prosecuting and defense counsel read by sailor as 'a rough draft of a play to his limbo audience at the bottom of the sea.' (p.109)

For Victor (or Victor's ghost), a victory of sorts has been won over his life as victim of enslavement of dismemberment by the institutions of an indifferent society, in the power 'to articulate, from an unconscious/subconscious struggle with fate, a deeper and more far-reaching processional note of liberation.' (p.125) For the art of fiction and the arts in general this may imply what the judge is also able to perceive as cultural poles which need to be taken as '[s]atellite never sovereign', in the words the surveyor Frank Wellington in *Genesis of the Clowns.* Harris, somewhat archly, celebrates the creative tension between '[o]n the one hand an expurgated series, English history and literature. The other on limbo pavement – East-Indian/African folktales, stories of pork-knocker/sailor/welder/El Dorado, charcoal limbs, artist's wall in the marketplace.' (p.125) It is from interaction of these contrasting traditions which should constitute a pluralist society that his carnivalesque vision springs; and is through the melding of these cross-cultural elements that he develops such novel, carnivalesque fictional forms as *Ascent to Omai.*

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In the novels read in this chapter there is clearly a continuation and development of the carnivalesque attributes of Harris's writing identified in *The Guyana Quartet.* This is discernible both in terms of the carnival as event – particularly in the conception of a limbo-stage where polarities such as life and death as well as gender and social roles are relativized and where elements of the cross-cultural imagination collide – and an accompanying stylistic expression through the use of highly experimental narrative techniques. The set of carnivalesque features derived from the impressionistic sketch of the history of carnival listed at the close of the first chapter has been used as a measuring stick for identifying carnivalesque elements in Harris's fictions, enabling us to recognise

the extent to which carnival in an objective sense figures in his writings. Yet the above readings have also observed features unique to Harris's vision, the brief index of which I have provided suggests that within these works there is tremendous diversity of significations both traditional and novel and a highly innovative development of and contribution to the genre of the carnivalesque.

The carnival of *The Whole Armour* with its conceits of animal masquerade, shamanic initiation and the theme of scapegoating is related to but not the same as the carnival of *The Eye of the Scarecrow*. In the later work the tendency to represent an abstract or subjective mode (e.g. the archetypal figure of the Scarecrow itself) is heightened and matters such as life and death, politics, memory and time itself are carnivalized to a greater extent. This tendency is reflected in various ways in the progression from the first to the second phases of Harris's work: on the one hand there is an increasing movement towards recognition of the cross-cultural dimension in a metropolitan milieu and there is greater consciousness of what this, metaphorically, carnival material can spell for the form of the novel in English.

Scenes in *Ascent to Omai* are based on the author's memory of street performances in his Guyanese childhood and are obviously highly specific. It is from the deeply considered symbolic associations which Harris reads into carnival celebrations and carnivalesque customs in Guyana – customs which have a palimpsestic backdrop of millenia of festive and folkloric elements across times and cultures fused into the present – develops a fusion of cross-cultural influences reflected in the novel. This aids Harris in his aim to burst out of the conventional or realist boundaries of the novel. Narrative techniques such as the almost allegorical representation of character with mixed animal and divine traits are which innovations recall a history of European carnivalesque forms (dramatic and fictional) and are also consistent with African and Amerindian elements. This mix is reflective of the inclusive principals of festival art in Caribbean Carnival.

Such elements, of course, are not always easy to identify specifically and the sheer creative vitality of their use and development in Harris's hands defies preconceived criteria for the carnivalesque. An example of both these points is the representational

implications of the presence of folkloric elements of Voodoo and its pantheon discussed in my reading of *Scarecrow*.

The fundamental impact of these factors at this stage of Harris's writing appears to be what is described in *Omai* as a 'sanctification of the grotesque': a reinstatement as well as revisioning of those elements which the classical realist or even grotesque-realist novel (coequal with the diminution of the carnivalesque in European cultural and literary history) rejected or marginalized. Harris consciously utilizes the voices or cultural accents of alternative and 'eclipsed' traditions residing in the Caribbean and Americas that may seem grotesque (in the pejorative sense) or even meaningless to the realist sensibility. However, for both the characters within and the overall form of these novels, as for the novelist himself, the apparent 'rubbish heap' of such a heritage is an invaluable resource for the revisioning of a stasis Harris identifies on social (interpersonal) and cultural (artistic and creative) levels of post-colonial and global society. Part and parcel of a 'limbo gateway' to the creation of community at a higher level than exists realistically, these apocryphal sources, the marginalia of history, clearly also provide material and innovative technical possibilities for the art of Harris's fictions.

Notes

1 The Radical Imagination, Alan Riach and Mark Williams, Liege: Liege University Press, 1992, p.41

2 Jelinek, 1992, p.63

3 A phrase from T.S. Eliot's poem 'Intimations of Mortality'

4 Ginzburg, 1991, p.264

5 The Infinite Rehearsal, Wilson Harris, London: Faber and Faber, 1990, p.1

6 "Carnival' and creativity' by Hena Maes Jelinek in Gilkes, 1989, p.49

7 An analogy can be drawn here with the conventions of the carriages and cars with their votives or slaves that figure in romantic literature such as the Triomfi of Petrach or Shelley's 'Triumph of Life'. In such conceits men and women of history are pictured in train to one or other vice or virtue as in Petrach's vision, or in slave to life or history itself as in Shelley's. Harris here depicts high and low, propertied and dispossessed, equalised in the train or processional of the dead.

8 Deven, 1953, p.102

9 'So realism is authoritarian in the sense that it has to stick to one frame. It cannot bring other texts into play. Realism has to work with one text. Very much like the journalistic text: one text, a single frame.' 'Judgement and Dream' by Wilson Harris in The Radical Imagination, Riach and Williams, 1992, p.26

10 Ibid, p.143

11 Ibid, p.145

12 c.f. this description of the Marassa, divine twins of Haitian Voodoo: 'The worship of the Marassa, the Divine Twins, is a celebration of man's twinned nature: half-matter, half-metaphysical; half-mortal, half-immortal; half-human, half-divine..' And, 'The metaphysical character of the Divine Twins is reflected in the beliefs and practices relating to contemporary twins, who are understood as two parts of a whole....' ibid, p.38-39

13 Prudence is, of course, one of the virtues of mediaeval Christianity.

14 Gilkes, 1975, p.xxvi

15 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guyanas', Harris, 1981, p.21

16 Bakhtin, 1968;1984, p.81

IV

'The Harlequin's Cloak'

> Drawing upon the historical past, the coexistence of diverse cultural traditions, and the wide ranging subjects of publications and broadcasts, designers have made Carnival a Masquerade Mix-up, a Callaloo of global dimensions.[1]
>
> John Nunley, in *Caribbean Festival Arts*

If the works covered in the last chapter witness to a 'limbo stage' and gateway through which breakdown and loss in the carnivalesque arena of post-colonial life (and the greater theatre of existence itself) may ultimately be redressed, then the next several novels can be read as composing a comic cycle 'effect[ing] a kind of recovery.'[2] Of the upsurge of comic elements in this phase of Harris's writings Mark McWatt observes:

> Violence, death, and disillusionment are as much a part of these novels as the earlier ones, but here these aspects are juxtaposed with the lightness and festivity of tone, and the incongruity of that juxtaposition generates a comic awareness of, or comic perspective upon, the traditional concerns of Harris's fiction.[3]

With *The Sleepers of Roriama* and *The Age of the Rainmakers* (1970), short story collections immediately following *Ascent to Omai*, Harris explores and develops themes of South American mythology in a contemporary idiom. Though these have a universal bearing, the next set of novels (beginning with *Black Marsden* (1972)) displays a more obvious global dimension – both in terms of their settings and subject matter – than any previous works. The strands of cross-culturalism which Harris explored earlier

in scenes and through characters of his native Guyana are developed and translated onto a broader geographic canvas, encompassing such locales as Edinburgh, Mexico City, Greenwich Village in New York City, Jamaica and London. Furthermore, the movement towards the realization of new form for the novel – in the creation of fictional mosaic suggestive of the wider 'creole aesthetic' of the Caribbean and in Caribbean carnival in particular – is strengthened and given greater breadth.

An important aspect of these fictions is the building of imaginative bridges from the 'New World' of Europe's former colonies back to the imperial centre, which as a consequence of that contact, is decentred. In bringing the aesthetics of cross-culturalism and diversity inherent in the Caribbean and Americas to novels set in Europe, Harris's work in this phase (and later) reflects the wider 're-colonization' of Europe by waves of West Indian emigration to the U.K. in the second half of the twentieth century. This has entailed, alongside a sheer physical and numerical dimension, a great cultural and artistic watershed. Harris's own migration to Britain in 1959 occured before the the publication of the novels of the Guyana Quartet, but it is not until these later works that the author begins to 'tilt the field' in his treatment of the 'Old World' itself.[4] This bears out Gilkes observation that the Caribbean writer's

> need for roots within the context of his own landscape as well as the cultured, metropolitan atmosphere in which his art can grow and flower, is a dilemma which still exists and makes possible the apparent paradox in which successful Caribbean writers - with few exceptions - live and work abroad, mainly in Britain and North America, but quarry their material from within a Caribbean consciousness.[5]

In the novel *Black Marsden*, for instance, this quarrying is evidenced through the translation of the features of Namless, an allegorical Central or South American environment, onto the locale of Edinburgh in an act of '*tabula-rasa* ' textuality.

In *Companions of the Day and Night*, which I will not be discussing but which has links with *Black Marsden*, the major setting is a Mexico of both the present day and pre-Columbian past. The *posada* ceremony (at Easter) which shapes and structures the

narrative forms a very clear 'para-carnivalesque' instance in the author's writing: here the synthesis is Spanish Christian/pagan Meso-American, but the principal forms an obvious parallel with carnival in the Caribbean. In *Genesis of the Clowns* (1977), Harris returns to the Guyana of the Quartet with new insight into the matrix of cultural influences latent there in an overtly carnivalesque and tragi-comic work – centring on the relationship of a surveyor with his crew – in which the symbolic pay-table acts as economic reference point and a sort of humorous cosmic-axis. *The Tree of the Sun* (1978), continuing where its preceding companion novel, *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* (1977) left off, uses the paintings of a Brazilian artist living in London as windows into a cross-cultural underworld of resemblances lying between seemingly far removed times and places, people and events. Furthermore, the painting or mosaic form functions as a metaphoric and metafictional equivalent of the text. The novel itself is the painting, the mosaic. An important event in the narrative is a carnival in the allegorically named West Indian island of Zemi and carnival in the wider – cross-cultural – sense of Harris's usage is central to the work.

This chapter undertakes readings of *Black Marsden*, *Genesis of the Clowns*, and *The Tree of the Sun* as representative works of this stage in Harris's fiction writing in the light of the carnival themes we have been following throughout this study. Increasingly with this and the next (latest) stage of Harris's works, his handling of the material of 'cross-cultural tradition' and his evolution of appropriate narrative forms within which to embody this material attains to the status of a new and unique instance of the carnivalesque in twentieth century fiction.

Black Marsden: a tabula-rasa *comedy* (1972)

> On the Journeys I had made through Fife last year I had been aware of the harlequin cloak of the seasons spread far and wide into strange intimacies and dissolving spaces.... The ancient palaces and corridors I visited were an extraordinary and naive cradle of kings woven nevertheless into complex, sometimes implacable legend. This combination of naive and complex features was true of kings whether in pre-Columbian America or pre-Renaissance Scotland or Europe. The idea obsessed me and I found myself at liberty to trace its contours around the globe since winning a fortune from the football pools. (p.)

Black Marsden is the first of Harris's novels to be set outside the writer's homeland, though its vividly conjured Edinburgh setting becomes a stage upon which cross-cultural (global and universal) carnivalesque themes surface. After the emblematically named Clive *Goodrich* stumbles upon the 'Clown or Conjurer or Hypnotist Extraordinary' (p.12) of the title in the ruins of Dunfermline Abbey, he finds himself thrust into the role of an unwitting 'patron of the arts'. His house begins to swell with a harlequinesque tableaux of characters: Knife, Harp and the beautiful Jennifer Gorgon; harpy and muse. The aura of the supernatural or even diabolic about Marsden and his fortuitous (or fateful) encounter with the somewhat ingenue Goodrich is, Alan Riach tells us, a familiar scenario in Scottish literature. The archetypal theme of an otherworldly visitor who tests, teases and instructs his host, then, is given a Celtic twist. This becomes an opportunity for the play of what has been recognised in Scottish literature as 'a love of fantasy and the *grotesque*'[6] [italics mine] against the solid backdrop of 'one of the oldest cities in Europe.' (p.111)

As Marsden asks Goodrich, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, somewhat grotesquely in a covering-letter closing the later novel, *Companions of the Day and Night*: 'is 'confession to a daemon that visits one the very foundation stone of all inspiration?"

Marsden and his troupe are assembled in Edinburgh to enact a production of Salome at the Festival and a major feature of this novel is its treatment of the literal and metaphoric dimensions of costuming and theatrical roles. Not only is the characterization strongly theatrical, but the sky over Princes Street itself is made to reflect and 'sustain a divine rule or play of elements.' (p.20) Similarly, against the elemental slate of Dunfermline, Marsden first appears to Goodrich 'like an ancient ghost from the abbey' (p.15). He is, evocatively, 'much older than you think' (p.30) and 'the black cloth or flesh he wore' (p.20) harbours many a feature of 'altered proportion'.

> His brow was knitted, corrugated. His cheeks seemed to bulge and sink into the physiognomy of a map - watersheds, rivers and valleys writ small but arresting and dangerous. His beard or forest fell and concealed his throat. (p.42)

Transposing features of landscape onto those of the face or body conveys a sense of the mythic carnivalesque in its associations with mask and costuming: a recurring technique in Harris's fiction.

Another instance of carnivalesque representation along the lines outlined in our readings of earlier novels, the characterization of Jennifer, whose 'phenomenal lover' Goodrich senses Marsden to be. Her depiction suggests techniques of masking and even masquerade. She not merely an actress dredged up from an 'appalling dive' in London, but 'the beautiful Gorgon of Marden's open-ended circus of reality.' (p.13) With her mysterious 'dress fit for a queen' (p.19), she encapsulates the chic of an age, the charm of a 'French fashion plate'. Yet when she enters Goodrich's sitting room with a mudpack on her face in the middle of the novel, there is a sense of masked comedy with chilling undertones, calling to mind perhaps the half-masks of *commedia dell'arte:*

> One half of her face was covered: draped in a towel which came around her head, knotted at the back. One half of her mouth, one eye, the greater part of her head was bandaged as though she had had an accident. Burnt. Disfigured. (p.59)

As well as being a temptress figure, then, she represents the grotesque underbelly of beauty in an age of dangerous illusions. Similarly, the nervous, chain-smoking actor, Harp, is cast as both a down and out bohemian and an uncanny agent of affinity with Goodrich possessing 'a face and head which may have been dug up from some forgotten workshop of the gods where it had lain discarded....' (p.45)

Goodrich, as wealthy patron, is ever the potential victim of Marsden's hypnotic tricks and deceptions, although in a dream of his (in which Jennifer appears as a kind of harpy whose nipples are coins) it is Marsden who plays the beggar. "Penny for the Guy', he said. 'Penny for the Guy" (p.20): an utterance which could (at the risk of over-interpretation) allude cryptically not merely to Guy Fawkes but to the earlier Wiccan rituals of pre-Christian Scotland related to the sacrificial rites of Carnival. If so, the 'penny of the sky', a token of sacrifice, is linked to a chain of other semiophores used as mediums of exchange encompassing a global phenomenon; the dreaming Goodrich lays out for him a 'pound, dollar note, franc [and], pre-Columbian bone and a shell'. Does this allude to the financial transaction as a medium of sacrifice in the modern as in the ancient world? Once again, the dream is like the text itself: open to interpretation. While Marsden's troupe walk a fine line between charming Goodrich and arousing his suspicions against their possibly mercenary motives, it is their host who becomes – in the inversion and irony of the carnivalesque – 'a prisoner on trial for the nightmare body of wealth he had accumulated' (p.19) from the football pools. This elucidates Marsden's somewhat ominous role as 'Director of Tabula Rasa Global theatre' (p.26). His ageless persona threatens at the same time as he illumines events and relationships.

The narrative perspective in *Marsden* shifts over the course of the novel between first person, third person and entries from Goodrich's diary. In one of Goodrich's literary efforts, a 'COMEDY OF FREEDOM' (p.25), left and right hand entries correspond to subjective and objective perception, conscious and unconscious contents highlighted on the stage of memory and desire.[7] This reflects the blend of the literal and surreal elements running throughout the novel, like interlacing forms in Celtic iconography. The arrival of Knife, for example, strikes a chord in Goodrich's memory with a beggar he had

encountered in Kingston, Jamaica, except that the beggar there was black. As Marsden tells Clive: 'There are affluent actors or beggars in affluent societies to play poor beggars acting out poor societies.' (p.28) Later, in a dream-like diary entry which significantly occupies the second half of the work, Goodrich undergoes a rite of passage of sorts through a 'Namless' landscape with the character Brown Knife, who exists on a continuum with the other two (Knives). This continuum, aside from illustrating what might be tagged a carnival tripletship, suggests the roles of people (or peoples) across the globe, to be variations on a theme – whatever their 'fantastic masks and costumes' (p.28). Of these, Clive with his 'scarecrow eye', becomes unwitting afficionado.

Textually, *Black Marsden's* 'tabula-rasa' comedy implies an erasure of conventional categories of thought and expression to link 'theatres of conquest or violation' and the 'theatre of the uninitiate' (p.21) around the world in 'a drama of altered proportions'. As the title suggests, the humour is somewhat black though not bleak. The surreal eyes in the Gorgon Jennifer's breasts in Goodrich's dream, for instance, correspond to her part as Salome in Marsden's production and, grotesquely, 'match the severed eyes of John the Baptist.' (p.40) This represents a paganization of Christian mythology (Salome amalgamated with a harpy), signifying within the context of a 'post-Christian age' a development of the theme of Saturnalian licence and its relationship to sacrifice. For Marsden 'freedom is a baptism in rivers of blood' (p.41), an allusion to the dangers courted when one sets about the revolutionary task of 'conceiving the dragon of freedom' (p.41). Jennifer herself – in a development which is comparable to the points raised about Catalena Perez in our earlier reading of *The Secret Ladder* – encapsulates these dilemmas as 'resurgent Gorgon'. She is both a beautiful actress and goddess of forms who represents 'our twentieth century fascination with freedom.' (p.43)

Although the influence of Marsden on Goodrich is ambivalent, it ultimately serves to throw light upon the nature of 'grotesque yet deeply significant transfigured relationships.... within the muse of history' that Harris persistently presents for us to ponder. 'Grotesque', as we have seen, is indeed a key term; a – if not *the* – cornerstone of the carnivalesque.

The carnival polarities of the benefactor and indebted in this novel – like the dualities of hunter/hunted, victor/victim, judge/judged in former works – are inverted or skewed: Marsden is a 'bank and beneficiary within whom the very act of giving became a receiving', sinister, yet a 'caveat of originality and community.' (p.55) His charades, undertaken 'with the air of an inimitable clown', have a deeper function as 'a philosophic and therapeutic masquerade' (p.56) which offers the possibility of 'the play within a play that repudiates the play of bias'. The importance to Harris's thought of what he describes as the repudiation or consuming of bias and the fact that Marsden is a sort of magus who suggests and provokes alternative readings of reality support Gilkes interpretation of the novel's 'Merlin-figure'[8] as an authorial shadow residing in the text.

Part of the repudiation of bias in the novel rests on a carnivalesque transubstantiation by which the features of ancient and present-day Scotland dissolve into those of a partially modern, partially timeless third world (Meso-American or South American) republic of the mind and spirit. Edinburgh and Scotland have transposed upon them the dream-like lines of the Andes, among other South American elements (p.62). Such a technique is related to the general principal throughout Harris's works of an erosion of constructs of certainty - sovereign poles, as it were - in favour of imbricated partial or parallel realities across time and space. This erosion or decentring technique harmonizes with the excavation of elements of Celtic heritage in the work: the Celtic sensibility being associated in aesthetic terms with subjectivity and 'feminine' attributes. This is reflected in the lacertine aspects of the work. There is a discernable weave. Each strand of existence is part of a complex whole, like the continuous patterning in Celtic knotwork :

> For one lived many lives, died many deaths through others. There was a renascence or flowering, a deeper accent of eclipse on buried personalities – actors in tabula-rasa drama in every encounter one enjoyed or endured. (p.67)

Another hallmark of tabula-rasa theatre and its surreal mode of representation apparent on a textual level throughout Harris's works is his portraiture of the nameless or anonymous fool, clown or scarecrow who haunts the liminal shadows of human experience. Goodrich himself suffers an acute sense of his role as a nameless idiot or scarecrow figure when he is jilted by Jennifer on the street. He reflects: 'My name is Clive Goodrich. Yet a name is but a cloak and sometimes a strange denuded 'I' steps forth.' (p.94) His invisibility to her by virtue of the very mask of his identity or non-identity is reminiscent in a way of the role of the mask as disguising device. An example of this is the *Egun-egun* form of masking in traditional Yoruba society (mentioned in the first chapter) where the mask of the performer not only represents but hides or guards the wearer from profane eyes. Invisibility itself is a magical and folkloric motif; and, in another sense, a major concern of feminist and minority literature in the twentieth century: a theme given a bizarre twist by Harris who reverses the roles. Clive styles himself as Jennifer's bridegroom and referring to an East Indian wedding ceremony concerned with dowry, buys a new costume (suit) in preparation for the sacral/profane marriage he envisages with the Gorgon. But fate ensures Marsden's ascendency as 'phenomenal lover' at the last moment and confirms the ceremony Goodrich has envisaged as a masquerade as well as his ultimate invisibility. His misrepresentation of himself has failed.

The fertile dimension of the affair has been the laying bare for the reader of the oracular subtext of Goodrich's musings. 'In Goodrich's book every correspondence of events within a individual life was an implicit and secret dramatization of buried universal themes within objective existence.' (p.103) Gilkes, in his discussion of the novel concludes:

> Black Marsden, informed by Harris's continually expanding vision, his wide-ranging interest, insight and compassion, is an alchemical vessel in which contrasting ideologies, images, cultures and landscapes are distiled to create a new and original wealth.[9]

Bringing to the attention of the reader a 'pattern of far-flung devious subconscious intelligences' (p.103) to repudiate the bias of expedient appearances and realistic designs, Goodrich and his papers are redeemed by their wider significance within 'the stigmata of a universal bridegroom whose personae was civilization' (p.104) This technique through which the contents of individual lives, writ large, become a commentary on civilization, a human comedy, is a major feature of Harris's writings which is in keeping with carnivalesque modes of representation (dramatic or literary) across the ages in which archetypal characters play out the conflicts and absurdities as well as triumphs of their age and of carnival-time.

Genesis of the Clowns (1977)

Genesis of the Clowns is another of the novels in Harris's opus which has already been read for carnivalesque features, in this case by Joyce Jonas in a chapter of her *Anancy in the Great House* entitled 'Clowns and Carnival'. She recognises fundamental carnival elements in the treatment by Harris of the literal and symbolic paytable across which the government surveyor Frank Wellington pays his crew.... 'In the inversions of carnival, the fool assumes kingly office, revealing by his burlesque performance the inadequacy of humanity to take up authoritarian positions.'[10] The ubiquitous fool of Harris's writings is represented in this case not only by the mixed crew Wellington leads into the interior, or by Wellington himself, but the comic principal itself which overturns the functional, mercantile facade of structured and static relationships in the novel to reveal a network of bizarre inter-relationships. In this process not only are the members of the crew and their intimates melded together, drawn along lines of 'carnival twinship', but by the close of the narrative the distinction between surveyor and crew, author and reader is dissolved.

What remains is a play on and of cultural differences and affinities knitted into a carnivalesque creation account.

As Wellington muses over the 'paytable of the years' (p.100) in later life during a walk beside the Thames, the members of a crew he had led into the Guyanese interior return to his mind. In the light of a carnivalesque 'alteration of proportions' worked by memory they appear like 'Governors and prime ministers and other functionaries.... coming to my paytable to receive the wages of history.' (p.28) The sense of time (or carnival time) conveyed in *Genesis* is complex; as in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* the faculty of recall is used to unlock latent potential existing in the past. Thus each crew member has, in retrospect, a significance beyond his obvious aspect. The acts of the carnal and adulterous Hope now take on the aura of an 'instinctive poem of sacrifice' (p.88); Cummings Day's attitude of self-repudiation becomes 'the garment of god'; Mosely Adams with his 'black comedy hammer of a fist' (p.90) reappears as the consort of a 'fertility goddess of light' (his wife Ada). Once again, there are many examples of representational techniques which cast the roles of these ordinary folk in mythic (divine) and therefore carnivalesque terms. The narrator asks himself at one point, for instance: 'Did ancient Adams and Adas sleep in the soil of time, larger than life, huge limbed, phallic, huge bodied, breasted?' (p.95) In the irony of carnivalesque inversion, the capitalistic Marti Frederick, by comparison, appears as nothing more than a 'stick of a man on which to hang a flag' (p.103).

While he had had only a glimmering of the divides existing between his perspective and those of his crew when he had been surveying rivers in the interior, the different vantage points raised by the ethnic and cultural background and heritages of Guyana incarnate in the crew take root in Wellington's consciousness over time. He realizes that when Cummings Day held the surveying staff, for instance, what had been to Wellington a simple instrument of science 'possessed [Cummings] like an elongated mask, a vertical pole, a science'. (p.94) Similarly the identity of Reddy and his kinsfolk shifts from being latter-day conscripted labour in a developing nation to mythic status,

thereby bridging the gap between realistic representation and the fabulous fictional universe of local folklore.

> He and his brothers are the walking shadow of the gods that once ruled the Guiana highlands.
>
> It is a token of their fall that they become members of my expedition into the Cuyuni river when I surveyed in 1942.

The reading of reality from a scientific, positivistic Western perspective is counterpoised with the animistic and 'irrational' tenets of indigenous Indian constructs. In a similar vein to Cummings Day's displacement in the technological scheme of things, Reddy sees in a theodolite or dumpy level 'the pole of the sun' (p.121) and in Wellington himself 'the masked god of light from olden times returning to address him now, in almost unimaginable terms, across the paytable.' (p.144) Reddy's 'reading' of Wellington bespeaks a common condition in the history of colonization: the projection onto the representative of Western cultural authority of divine attributes. This projection is carnivalized in *Genesis* as the re-memberment of the past reverses the direction of conferal and elevates the dispossessed of history to divine, or semi-divine, status.

Another carnivalesque motif central to the novel, mirroring the function of the paytable, is that of The Marketplace (that we touched upon briefly for *The Whole Armour* and which is also an important setting or symbolic locale in *The Tree of the Sun*). Here it becomes a stage not only of economic exchange in which social roles and hierarchies are accentuated and/or inverted, but a cultural arena infused with limbo imagery. It is where, in Jonas's words, 'the trickster god of the marketplace resides'[11]. In the grinding poverty of a 'developing nation', 'money walked on stilts with its feet in a flood' (p.96). Mercantilism is depicted as so pervasive that it infects nature itself so that 'the sun rolled down the sky and vanished all of a sudden like a huge coin within the till of the savannahs.' (p.108) This stands in direct contrast to the mythologizing sensibility of the tribal remnants of Guyana for whom the sun is the ruling deity of the heavens. However, amongst the bric-a-brac 'cupids walked hand in hand with anancy figures inscribed on a

battered clock': a recognition that the market-place is also a cross-cultural matrix drawing together disparate elements.

The theme of dance, especially limbo dancing, is closely linked to the market-place and typifies the potentialities of this inherently carnivalesque locale as a centre of happening in its own right – evidenced for example in the empowering description of Mistress Ada, who is selling her wares, as a 'heavy weight dancer' (p.96). Jonas recognises in the dance itself a carnivalesque principal of representation: 'Together the dancer on the ground and the dancer on stilts parody the godlike and the humbled - implying that both positions are merely moments in a dance.'[12]

As suggested by its title, *Genesis* is a sort of apocryphal creation account in which 'the creation of capital' and 'the comedy of divinity' (p.102) are conflated in a critique of the age. The text depicts character as existing on a continuum larger than individual parts, so that personal dramas become a microcosmic enactment of larger, deeper cultural conflicts. The story of the *players* in *Genesis* (there is in this, as in all Harris's works, a dramatic sense of how men and women gamble with fate) is also the history of the nation of Guyana and the drama of creation, 'the great game', itself. While, as always, the writer presents the regenerative or revivificatory possibilities of cultural exchange, there is also an awareness of the dangers residing in the collective psyche; the potential for confusion and misrule spilling into violence and rape inherent in such a charged situation. These facts elucidate his unique sense of comedy, which resides not simply in disparate comic elements, but in a wider perception, the principle of carnivalesque relativity which exists on individual *and* cultural planes. In a vital passage Wellington, an unmistakable authorial figure, reflects:

> For the comedy of the sun was the tragedy of polarized cultures on the brink of an awareness of themselves as satellite never sovereign. It was a huge *Copernican* step, an unimaginable step for economic man, for primitive man, for economic child, for primitive child to take....
>
> I glimpse also the price heterogenous societies pay to achieve this in apparent catastrophe or transition towards a medium of

> consciousness susceptible to dual insight and creativity and original compassion. (p.118)

As is true throughout Harris's writings, it is only *compassion* which can contain and transmute the raw material of catastrophe on personal and global levels into true progress for the human psyche and human civilization. Harris implies in his work that the turning point in cyclical time represented by the collision of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial world, if celebrated rather than denied or suppressed, may yet yield to a period of renewal.

The ideal of the creation of a 'new earth' peopled by souls with 'masks of light' (an almost Shellyan revolutionary vision expressing these hopes for cyclical renewal) is predicated on acknowledgment and assimilation of the shadows which haunt humanity. These are unconscious or repressed elements which need to be allowed expression. An example of this could be the rhythmic and percussive sense, closely linked to the sensual and erotic as well as spiritual and shamanistic, that have been denied for several centuries in Western culture, but that was more openly celebrated in the communal life of African and other traditional societies. Thus 'the skeletal hand.... on which Hope banged, a steel drum, an orchestra, a carnival' (p.134) augers a potential thaw in the 'frozen genesis of economic clowns in a multicultural complex' (p.144) 'Frozen genesis' suggests that the development of identity and selfhood for the 'clowns' of a post-colonial nation in the throes of Neo-Imperialism has been arrested, but that there is a latent 'multicultural complex' to be recognized and celebrated. However, as in much of Harris's work, there is an unfinished and enigmatic quality to reality and experience.

The note upon which the novel ends is with Young Lucille (the spitting image of her mother, with whom Hope had had an affair) meeting 'F.W.'s' doppelganger at the Port of Spain Carnival. This sinister manifestation of 'carnival twinship' seems to suggest that continuum of human experience within which racial, social and sexual opposites are merely masks, or static moments in a dance. What gives the novel creative

tension is th struggle is to represent and understand the larger matrix from which these identities spring:

> Twin Wellington's, black and white, twin Lucilles, fantasy and beauty, father, son, mother, daughter all rolled into one carnival, into past and present persona, into known and unknown masks.... (p.148)

The Tree of the Sun (1978)

The painter Da Silva da Silva whose canvases permeate and, in a sense, *are* the pages of *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* and *The Tree of the Sun* directs the reader through his art to the flowering of a multicultural sensibility that is carnival in the highest sense of Harris's usage. (This chapter restricts itself to a reading of the latter novel which is a continuation and extension of the themes of the former.) With antecedents 'Arawak, European and African' (p.1) da Silva reflects the writer's own racial heritages and the mosiacs he creates are a beautiful illustration of a principal of artistry which has strong links with the 'creole aesthetic' associated with the carnivals in the Caribbean and elsewhere around the globe: the incorporation of diverse elements into a 'complex whole'.

That the aesthetic dimensions of cross-cultural exchange and hybridity is central to the work is attested to by the entire fabric of the narrative. In da Silva's painting of the horsechestnut in the garden of he and his wife Jen's Holland Park flat, for instance, the tree is depicted as a visionary nexus in which 'all places around the globe witnessed to and mirrored an event, half-tragic encounter of heterogenous cultures.' (p.2). The Brazilian painter is fully aware of 'Arawak antecedent voices, [a] pre-Columbian chorus' (p.7) in his background and these, along with other cross-cultural elements, form the basis of his project of creating a mosaic which mirrors, elevates, and fulfils the medley of

influences surrounding and underpinning the experience of an expatriate South American living in a metropolitan centre of Europe.

He attempts to capture, among other things,

> [t]he paradox of vanished conquistadorial Europe and vanished pre-Columbian America still surviving nevertheless in smooth death-masks, smooth birth-masks with their infinite grained capacity for elemental *need* within iron trees and ivory trees of the cosmos.(p.7)

Da Silva, therefore, celebrates the cross-cultural in his canvases, though appreciating the paradoxes of setting out, for example, '[t]o paint a Mexican sky under his English roof' (p8). Described as an 'artist clown' (p.52), he parallels Harris's role – alluded to over the course of this study – as carnival artist in several senses. His canvases are the globe, the globe his canvases. The pregnancy of Jen parallels his creative birthpangs and the budding reality of their child becomes a metaphor for the birth or renewal of the many coloured glass that is the post-colonial world.

The Tree of the Sun typifies the ecstatic in Harris's fiction, a mode of experience and representation closely connected with the celebratory aspect of carnival. Fecund in its symbolism, sumptuous in its multi-layered narrative and carnivalesque in its representation of character, the text everywhere attests to, affirms, and celebrates 'the food bearing/lovemaking spirit' (p.55) residing in the 'tree of the cosmos'. Although there is an acute acknowledgement of the 'sacrificial seed' (p.3) which precedes the conception of any new form or era and the novel is not without depictions of suffering and mourning, more than any previous work *The Tree of the Sun* emphasises the revivificatory spirit moving within the cycles of nature and humanity. 'There's an innermost art of resurrection as the sun-god balloons into each age, death mask, life mask, an innermost art of descent from the asylum of heaven', (p.6) da Silva reflects.

The painter is inspired, amongst other things, by 'a spark that had run across the divide between the living and the dead' (p12), the ancestral voices that dwell within the ancestral body and psyche of a 'transubstantial community' (p.13) and are a feature of

Carnival time and its parades. Such elements in the various stages upon which humans act out the evolutionary drama show 'the chaos of human freedom' (p.17) on the one hand and 'the many faces of a conjurer's universe.' (p.17) on the other.

A central concern of the novel is with the 'resurrection of the body' (p.16), an element in Harris's writing among those which have earned him the reputation of being something of a latter-day Christian Gnostic. Christianity certainly figures in the symbolism of the work, but as a religious creed takes its place within a universal spiritualizing (and relativizing) tendency in Harris's writing. Reincarnation is equally as strong a theme: in fact the novel can be read at one level as reconciling the religious traditions of resurrection and reincarnation rather than rejecting both. This inclusive, non-dualistic ethos rejects the Aristotelian *either so or not so* in favour of a number of alternative possibilities. Drake recognises in Harris's writings 'the concept of parallel possibility as the way to break what [he] calls 'obsessive centrality', [and] attain a decentred system'.[13] Exemplifying such a principle of parallel possibility and attesting to a cross-cultural spiritual impulse is the process by which da Silva and Jen, while renovating their flat, become curiously aware of the 'antecedent tenants, Francis and Julia Cortez.' Francis a 'half-Spanish, half-black' man and Julia 'half-English, half-West Indian creole' (p.10) enter into da Silva's canvases and take on a life of their own. Through delving into the diaries left by Julia and a novel upon which Francis was working husband and wife become aware of the pair as 'related characters in a curious drama of creation' (p.10) separated from them by a mere fifty years or so in time.

The romantic life of this couple, 'resurrected in da Silva's canvases' (p.21), is a variation on themes in theirs, and through Jen Julia, in a sense, enjoys what had been denied her previously; the birth of a child. A shortcoming in the relationship between Julia and Francis had been his suspiciousness towards her darker, hidden aspects – coequal to a West Indian racial heritage – and this makes him reticent about their having a child: 'he saw through her masks of Europe into a darker potential, a heterogeneous potential.' As antecedent tenants, then, Francis and Julia are at one level previous, unfinished incarnations of da Silva and Jen slightly earlier in the time/space continuum.

They represent less fulfilled versions of the later couple. Yet the characterization of these potentially spectral figures who come to life in da Silva's canvases is as full bodied and convincing as that of the artist and his wife and testifies to a multi-layering effect (in terms of the writer's treatment of identity) more sophisticated than in any previous work. This representation of character shares many carnivalesque features along the lines previously discussed, as well as testifying to significant new elements. Da Silva as 'painter of constellations who resurrects the mystery of undying symptoms of therapeutic masquerade' (p.11) is the Harrisian figure who brings into play these anterior identities which had been either suppressed or not fully realized previously.

Masquerade is an important metaphor in the text as elsewhere in Harris: Francis, for example, in one description wears the 'divided features of warrior and priest', an allusion to antecedent identities of his own across time, and Julia 'crowned and beautiful, one foot in a wedding, one foot in a funeral' (p.11) is a carnival queen figure of sorts. In the description of a literal masquerade in the form of a society ball Francis and Julia attend in which Julia plays Atahualpa, he Franscisco, there may a subtle allusion to the roles of man and woman as colonizer and colonized. The theme of masquerade, therefore, encompasses both the manner in which people adopt or don the garb of a certain role, and, at the other extreme, the vehicle by which a more fundamental identity can be expressed (the disguise and revelational aspects of mask). However, the novel acknowledges the ongoing and provisional nature of disrobing the self of its veils of illusion: 'What a long way one has to go to begin all over again through a tissue of masquerades and self-deceptions.' (p.18)

As an example of individual lives reflecting not only wider social and cultural but cosmic themes (such do the clowns of *Genesis*), when Julia and Francis quarrel it is reflects not simply a lover's tiff but 'an unresolved ancient carnival feud of the parentage of the cosmos planted in their common flesh and blood.' (p.40) In asking the question '[i]s there an equation between fallible lust and infallible divinity' (p.53), the novel holds out the possibility of a resurrection of divine elements of humanity through and beyond the frailties of flesh and blood. If my reading of the text is supportable, the medium of

such a resurrection is in the transformation and carnivalesque enthronement of human beings leading to recognition of people as mercurial representatives of the descent of divinity into mortal frames: 'It was this coming miraculous translation of a motivated creator of terrifying universes into kings and queens in fire...' (p.54)

Other characters in the novel also incorporate various elements of carnivalesque representation. The 'ladies in waiting' to the psychical crowning of Jen which da Silva undertakes through his depiction of her in his canvases illustrate this well. Eleanor Rigby, an actress 'implicitly clad in furs', who in the Beatles' popular song 'kept her face in a jar by the door', and the figure Rima, in her bird sanctuary, goddess of nature and of fire (transposed from Hudson's *Green Mansions*) (p.29) both exhibit overtly animal characteristics in the tradition of carnival's blending of bestial, human and divine attributes in the one figure. Da Silva muses regarding Eleanor: 'The grotesquerie of animal instinct, that clothed Eleanor Rigby in furs...he possessed no foothold into the unpredictability of the seasons, the savage lightnings of Christ, the tiger.' (p.30) Elsewhere she is described as 'the lioness woman' (p.61). The characterization of Harlequin, husband of Eleanor, business man, and gun collector, bespeaks other aspects of carnival costuming (p.31), for instance in a reference to the 'mask of blue, black, red blood he wore within flesh and bone' (p.32). The interpenetration of personalities in 'carnival twinship' that we have recognised as a recurrent feature of Harris's grotesque portraiture of character is also a device used in this narrative. For instance, Eleanor's lovers Leonard and Francis are twinned so to speak by the woman when she 'Drew Francis to mask himself in Leonard, in bed, in Eleanor's arms' (p.53) in an act of 'limbo sex.' (p.53)

Other significant carnivalesque elements in the novel are the familiar themes of the interrelationship of the funeral and carnival, with the addition in this case of the wedding; and the conception of the passage of events in 'carnival time'. 'A body of mutated associations seemed to cluster and arise out of wedding day, resurrection day, carnival...' (p.25) Each ceremony or celebration is transformed in proximity to the other to create a sense of the paired festive and grievous aspects of experience. Julia's funeral,

for instance, coincides with the day of the Ironmonger's 'solemn wedding and a honeymoon' (p.21) creating the pleasantly profane idea of a 'resurrection day carnival' (p.30). She grapples with the non-linear sense of time, carnival time, which her sensibility dictates to her in contradiction to established the precepts of her day: '[w]e live backwards into the future' until 'we may live forwards into the past', she muses, and similarly, '[w]e may live on either side of the grave' (p.38).

As in *Genesis of the Clowns*, the marketplace (in this case Portobello Road in Notting Hill Gate - also a locale in London where many West Indians have settled and where one of the largest carnivals in Europe is held) becomes a symbolic centre and repository of cultural as well as economic discourse. The hustle and bustle of the market conceals a underworldly human comedy so that in the paintings of da Silva 'the pathway of the street was crowded with a carnival of spectators who slipped in and out of currencies of death and lives, of masks and appearances, in and out of the foodbearing tree of the sun.' (p.55) Amid plainly absurd goings on - such as a '[m]ock auction at the stall of David and Bathsheba' and the sale of Michelangelo's David – in which the wares of civilization are symbolically traded as well as the 'effects of creation' (p.57) – is the sense of a multicultural matrix similar to that recognised in the previous novel, although here the setting is metropolitan :

> In the slow procession of mankind that moved beneath the stalls or on the pavement, in the numerous eyes that stopped to scan a variety of things, the numerous hands that held or offered a variety of things, every feature seemed represented, Indian men, women in sweeping robes, Chinese, Japanese, Jews, West Indians, Londoners and other English folk, French, Italians, Spanish. Bearded faces. Beardless faces. Black and white Americans with cameras slung over shoulders. (p.57)

Although the market holds out a caveat for the creation of community the writer is equally aware of 'the subtlety and enormity of the challenges to life involving levels of conscious and subconscious illumination of animal deity, of populations and complications in evolutionary disguise' (p.58). The coming of da Silva's child leads the father to reflect on

the inequalities of distribution and the misrepresentation of the globe by Eurocentric cultures 'across four painted centuries of the making of modern maps, as the balance of wealth shifted by degrees from the gold of the Indies to the rise of a North Atlantic civilisation.' (p.59). In this colonialist conceit 'Greenland grew larger than South America in Mercator's pregnant globe' (p.59), but the coming child, although the 'offspring of Mercator's stick', may represent nevertheless an emblematic breakthrough into a new era. He or she would thus be the child denied Francis and Julia and in whom is embodied a shift towards the freedoms of a multicultural world. As elsewhere in Harris the 'eternal mother and child' (p.59) form part of a regenerative trope that can transcend the despoilation wrought by men.

To return to the subject of the interpenetration of funeral, wedding and carnival, I would like to close this reading of *The Tree of the Sun* by discussing some scenes from the final chapters of the novel which recall the childhood and young womanhood of Julia on the West Indian isle of Zemi. Important events to do with carnival punctuate Julia's upbringing. She witnesses dances and limbo contests as a girl on her father's estate and attended her first carnival ball at the age of 18 (p.64). Her first taste of carnival itself on the island is captured in a description which refers to her ascent of a tropical mountain and the descent of the 'divinity of the sky' who, literally or metaphorically, rapes her. Yet even the travail of rape is given revivificatory potential. She emerges from this encounter with this 'lover of infinity' who may have been imaginary, or who could conceivably have taken the form of one of the celebrants, but who symbolically represents da Silva (with whom she has a life-long spectral affair) 'raped yet wholly painted' and translated into '[an]other kingdom' (p.70). Later passages which centre on her assimilation of the experience and its effects on her development show its initiatory dimensions. It was

> her first substitute carnival gateway into the annunciation of the globe as an absorption of sorrows on a pin or a star or a splinter in the eye of the needle within which unseen populations danced (p.71)

and

> perhaps that ascent had been her first adolescent carnival sensation of a hand dissolving the elements, constructing the elements, a hand that could blow fierce and strong backwards from future or past into a created or un-created emotional presence within one and without one. (p.72)

Another important formative event in Julia's life, nearly coinciding with her marriage to Francis, was her father's funeral after 'he collapsed in a black woman's bed.' (p.77) This solemn occasion is given comic, carnivalesque qualities which relativize the tragedy of the grave, such as when the '[e]longated box or horse with human legs began to move within a space of attendant bodies so that the entire implications of the waving procession were metamorphosis of cavalry.' (p.80) Although in a certain light the proceedings can be read as a parody of human hopes for an afterlife, the presentation of a hermaphroditic creator deity, to which the contents of the coffin is returned, waiting amiably under a 'tree of the sky and sun', expresses Harris's refusal to invest in the atheistic and existential tenet of the complete extinction of existence at death. 'The procession wound its way to the hollow in which God lay under the tree of the sky and the sun. As it drew there, deposited its coffin, confronted its seed of unfathomable father/mother divinity...' (p.8)

A further instance of carnivalesque 'blending' of kingdoms along the lines discussed previously is illustrated by the description of 'the condition of man standing between costumes of heaven and earth as gatecrasher (mirror crasher) into soils, souls, minerals, animals and other nameless elements' (p.83). Bestiality is counterbalanced by an element of 'radical divinity upon the human frame' (p.85). Julia's appearance in the 'carnival theatre' (p.90) of the twenty first century at the symphonic finale of the novel is a playful affirmation of the resurrection and carnivalesque instatement or reinstatement of what Blake called the 'human divine' as an entity stretching outside linear time into the eternity of carnival time.

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Although each of the novels read in this chapter exhibits its own set of carnivalesque features there are unifying threads within a general development that we have been arguing in this study. *Black Marsden*, for example, is characterized by a sense of the grotesque that is both rooted in a Scottish literary background, native to carnival and its representational modes and peculiar to Harris's sensibility. Theatrical imagery, harlequinesque 'costuming' feeding into the novel's characterization, carnival inversions of status, and the transposition of geographic features from the Americas to Europe are elements of this. Theatrical themes fused with carnivalesque themes such as the mask and masquerade underline the identification we have made of such motifs as sacrifice and the sacred wedding. The narrative itself encapsulates and celebrates a medley of cultural and stylistic influences which displace a unitary reading of events.

Genesis of the Clowns is equally concerned with cultural exchange as a carnivalesque arena, and the very title of the work bespeaks a carnivalization of the sacred (in this case the creation myth of *Genesis*). The story of the coming into being of the symbolic 'crew' and their affiliates in the imagination of the surveyor becomes an account of the origins of the world or of the world today. The relativization of cultural difference inherent in the narrative is itself a form of ironic reversal of the authority of ruling constructs and is a carnival conceit in the cross-cultural sense Harris's increasingly reads into the festival. In *The Tree of the Sun* the presence of actual carnival celebrations in the text serves to emphasize the wider usage of the festival by Harris in his formulation of its significance for the modern world. The novel features several of the elements established as central to carnivals across time in the first chapter, notably the grotesque of animal identity (or bestial attributes) underpinning the characterization of people; the depiction of a continuum which encompasses the human and divine as well by which the human is 'crowned' with divinity; the interpenetration of the world of the living and the dead; and the festive sense of a revival or rebirth following the sacrifice of a previous condition within cyclical time.

Again we recognise some uniquely Harrisian carnivalesque traits throughout these novels such as the representation of carnival twinships; the countenancing of several possible interpretations or readings of a situation to the degree that a series of possible realities exist independently rather than one frame; a narration of time that is not a closed phenomenon but self-revising entity through the medium of consciousness; the charging of individuals with mythic or divine attributes to propel them into an empowered or divine aspect; and the reflection of all these elements in the very unpredictable acts of juggling or gymnastics manifest in practically each sentence of his fictional writings.

It is obvious that at this stage of Harris's work carnival has a multivalent function and wide range of significations that is true to the role of the grotesque in Bakhtin's account of carnival's creative and positive utilization of satire, parody and other forms of the festive perception within the ongoing processes of an organic whole. Including the polarities of sacrifice and rebirth, life and death, the wedding, the funeral, the resurrection; the realm of the market and the medium of multi-cultural exchange it ideally represents; and the media of music and song and dance in the text, carnival has by this stage become for Harris a multivalent metaphor and metafictional principal organising the material and inspiring its manifestation in novel, carnivalesque forms. With the next phase of Harris's work this trend moves towards a climax.

Notes

1 'Caribbean Festival Arts: an introduction', John Nunley, Nunley and Bettelheim, 1988, p.35

2 'Wilson Harris interviewed by Alan Riach', Riach and Williams, 1992, p42

3 'A Late Dazzle of Sun' : Aspects of Wilson Harris's Comic Vision in Black Marsden, Mark A. McWatt in (ed.) Jelinek, 1991 p.148

4 Riach writes about Black Marsden: '[t]he language.... suggests an understanding of historical depth which, in Harris's visions, is wedded to geographical scope, so that the traditional Western unitary understandings of place, time, character, and progress are upset. The field is tilted.' 'The Scottish Element in Black Marsden', Alan Riach in (ed.) Jelinek, 1991, p.163

5 Gilkes, 1975, p.x

6 'The Scottish Element in Black Marsden', Alan Riach; Jelinek, 1991, pp.162;160

7 Gilkes writes: 'Harris is advocating a broader, more compassionate view of life in which Man's 'realistic' right hand knows what his 'visionary' left hand is doing.' Gilkes, 1975, p.149

8 The likeness of Marsden to Merlin was suggested by Gilkes, 1975, p.145.

9 Gilkes, 1975, p.151

10 Jonas, 1990, p.84

11 Ibid, p.78

12 Ibid, 1992, p.83

13 Drake, 1986, p.176

V

'The Climax of Carnival'

With the republication in 1993 of *Carnival* (1985), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987), and *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (1990) in one volume as 'The Carnival Trilogy' and the release of *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* (1993) a new, clear phase of Harris's work was defined.

A central feature of the *The Carnival Trilogy* is Harris's aim to re-evalute (by rereading and, after a fashion, rewriting) major texts in the Western literary tradition. It is true that this is a visible element from the earliest of his fictions where the poetry of Blake, Yeats and Eliot, for example (as well as many other textual elements), come into dynamic interplay with Caribbean and South American elements (e.g. mythology and folklore). From the outset he has sought to forge an imaginative unity from the material of 'cross-cultural tradition'. In *Tradition the Writer and Society* (1967) tradition is conceived as a living and radical force running through the dialogue between culture and civilization, and it is in this latest phase of his writing that the ideals which Harris set forward then, as such as the requirements for 'the epic and revolutionary novel of associations', can be seen to be most fully realized or fulfilled.[1]

In *The Carnival Trilogy* Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Marlowe's and Goethe's *Faust* and *The Odyssey* all figure in 'epic and revolutionary' narratives through daring and sophisticated acts of intertextuality. In the same way that his most recent volume of criticism, *The Womb of Space*, claims a unconscious unity or communality arcing between the fictions of various modern writers (such as Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Ellison, and Jean Rhys) and South American elements (such as the signification of the bone flute in Amerindian mythology), Harris in the present set of novels brings into play elements

from wide ranging sources to transform the 'master texts' within the crucible or cauldron of the cross-cultural imagination. The manner in which the substance of these works takes on a new life in the context of the twentieth century and its cross-cultural legacies is a further stage in the type of carnivalization commented on in the last chapter: the colonization of the 'Old World' and its forms with the attributes of the 'New'.

Here key texts from the Western literary canon are revised in a manner that parallels the wider cultural impact on Europe and the globe of what has been called 'the creole aesthetic'. Harris's re-reading of Dante is in keeping with recent trends towards approaching the *Commedia* as a map of the psyche (Fowlie) and to 'detheologize' the great Italian poet (Barolini).[2] However, Harris also radically extends existing canons of interpretation and demonstrates the possibilities for an imaginative reworking. This complements his wider advocacy of the cross-cultural imagination as a vehicle for rebirth. He has written:

> Despite the strength of nihilism in the West and the so-called Third World, it is arguable that society is approaching in uncertain degree a horizon of sensibility upon which a capacity exists to begin to transform claustrophobic ritual by cross-cultural imaginations that bear upon the future through mutations of the monolithic character of conquistadorial legacies of civilization, and that one is not wholly circumscribed by 'genetic robot' or Orwellian nemesis.[3]

Through the processes of an cross-cultural dialogue which the artist articulates and makes explicit, then, a discovery or rediscovery of 'complex wholeness' or 'imaginative unity' is salvaged from the age of conquest and ensuing post-colonial despoilation, conferring meaning on events and establishing the grounds for a viable future for humanity.

The Carnival Trilogy is so saturated with carnival referents and carnivalesque elements – from minute details to the greater design – that more than one study could be devoted to the subject. Al Creighton described the Trilogy well as 'those recent novels in which Harris seems preoccupied with the eternal cyclic existence of man, and dramatizes this story with each character playing roles through infinite rehearsals in an endless theatrical carnival of life.'[4] With *The Carnival Trilogy* carnival has become a – if not *the*

– central metaphor and organizational matrix in Harris's fiction. In this chapter I discuss the significance of this for the novel *Carnival*, with more or less passing references to the other two works in the Trilogy and *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*. This is not to imply that Harris's carnival does not continue to evolve beyond its fictional namesake – indeed, the following works intensify many of *Carnival's* concerns - but the devotion of a chapter to this single work provides an opportunity to read in greater depth 'the climax of carnival' themes which the novel represents.

Carnival (1985)

Carnival might at first appear an unlikely theme and complex through which to reread Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, but given the historical character of the festival as an initially pagan celebration colonized by the Christian Church and in recent times recolonized by the once pagan 'New World', it provides solid and inspired grounds for Harris's 'twentieth century comedy of existence'. The tripartite structure of Dante's visionary, otherworldy poem is given a new and radical relevance with its incorporation into the 'frames' of modern day life and its latent field of cross-cultural correspondences. The realms of the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise become intertwined with everyday characters and situations – heretical pagan material – in Harris's great 'revisionary allegory', 'carnival epic' and comedy.

The novel opens with scenes at the end of the life of the emblematically named Everyman Masters, whose posthumous guidance to the novel's narrator, Jonathan Weyl, casts him in the role of a 'Virgillian guide'. Masters, as his name suggests, represents the carnival extremes of worldly experience: that of the master and of the common or garden everyman. His insight into the masks of the soul worn by men and women – 'a penetration of masks that stitch into being a universal and complex Carnival or capacity

for shared wounds, shared ecstasies, between past and future through living actor and hidden force' (p.11) – is communicated to the 'biographer of spirit' Weyl to lead or help him through the labyrinth of contemporary experience into communion with the divine in human nature and in the cosmos or 'a vision of paradise'. This unravelling involves an integration and in many respects the climax of the carnival themes we have been tracing throughout Harris's fictions. Amongst them: the metaphoric significance of the mask, masquerade, and dramatic or performance elements associated with these; carnival as a sacrificial and revivificatory medium of time in its own right; the mixed animality and divinity of humankind; the vital carnival themes of the market-place, music, song and dance; the interrelationship of life and death; the relativity of tragedy and comedy in the global setting of the late twentieth century; and the potentialities of cross-culturalism in a world marred by violence yet still open, in Harris's estimation, to the revolutionary mystery of redemptive love.

Yet, mysteriously enough, unlike some of the novels previously discussed there is no *actual* or literal carnival in the entire work. Instead, the fabric of the narrative itself is an expression of a profound carnival consciousness and a tome of carnivalesque features.

On returning to his flat intoxicated on the evening of his sixty-fifth birthday, Everyman Masters fatefully encounters a woman, Jane Fisher (the Second) who has moved into the flat above his Holland Park apartment. Her bizarre correspondence or 'carnival twinship' with another Jane Fisher (the First) who had stabbed him years before in New Forest, South America, presages his 'second death'. Masters immediately realizes that '[i]n her lay the climax of Carnival, the terror of dying, the bliss of reciprocal penetration of masks.' As unwitting celebrant, she is represented in the terms of a carnival masker: '[a] needle seemed to stitch a spirit on to her lips. Red wine for thread. White skin for fabric. Blackest hair for a veil or net.' These elements are all 'Carnival fabric' and 'costume'. That she wears 'another woman's jealous mouth' reveals the underlying principal, as with the Knives in *Black Marsden* and 'twin Lucilles' of the carnival related at the close of *Genesis of the Clowns*, that apparently distinct individuals can share a metaphysical unity in the carnival of life's events. One of the salient features of this, once

again, is the transcendence of arbitrary racial divisions or 'pigmentation'. 'A black or brown divinity could wear a *white* mask and *red* lips and still reveal itself complexly, profoundly, as other than whiteness or redness.' (p.9)

Intense theatricality directs the scene between Masters and Jane Fisher the Second underlining the interrelationship of dramatic and carnivalesque modes of representation. Masters speaks to her 'as if they were characters in a play' (p.10). There are overt references to time itself ('Carnival time') as a stage for the enactment of carnival themes:

> They were real yet unreal presences to each other as all human shocking intercourse is. One lives in and out of Carnival time since each element that masks us sustains time as its original medium of sacrifice within creation. Not only that. Original medium of theatre. One is the other's veil of timely or untimely dust. (p.11)

Caught 'between theatres of the dying, theatres of the living' (p.11), *Carnival*'s character's inhabit a surrealistic realm in which, like Jane Fisher, they can suddenly find themselves thrust into strange and terrifying 'performance'. Their lives illustrate larger relationships in the global comedy. Their actions, to use a phrase from *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, 'reflect.... the moral dilemmas of an age' (p.4)

The psychological as well as literal wounds which the 'doomed' Masters received in the past are given a religious or metaphysical significance as he enacts his final scenes. Like an actor in a great tragedy he delivers a grand soliloquy to the bemused Jane Fisher, telling her '[t]he Word is the Wound one relives again and again within many partial existences of Carnival'. (p.13) That their love-making is the climax of Masters' life and directly precedes his death demonstrates the interconnection between '[t]he wedding feast and the funeral' that featured in *The Tree of the Sun*. Masters' desire for a consummation of his life's goal, 'the art of dying he sought', flows from the infliction of the dagger wound he received at the hands of Jane Fisher the First and her husband in New Forest who had taken him to be another overseer: 'I was human game to be

slaughtered. The wound I received was my first human/animal death, human game.' (p.14)

The image of the hunt with a human as wounded game reflects the bestial aspect of sexual relations and the destructive energies of eros in a world in which the relationship between man and woman, between guilt and innocence can be as hard to distinguish as that of master and slave, hunter/huntress and hunted. In this case Masters, who has been a hunter, a plantation king who used the women on his estate to his own ends, becomes the hunted, in another instance of carnivalesque reversal. Master's last words underline the universal significance of what is occuring and set the scene for the intense revisionary allegory which follows. 'How to identify those who are guilty from those who are innocent! How to perceive the morality of Carnival within a universal plague of violence! That is our play. We shall descend, ascend, we shall travel around the globe.' (p.14)

Following the death of Masters at the hands of an unknown, masked intruder – mysteriously 'related within a labyrinth of rehearsals' – after Jane Fisher has left his bed, Jonathan Weyl has a portentous dream in which his wife 'Amaryllis ascended above the stage of Carnival and said to the dead king Masters that he should return to my fiction and become my guide into the Inferno and the Purgatory of the twentieth century world.' (p.15) The narrative then returns to childhood scenes of Masters and his cousin Thomas on the Atlantic foreshore of New Forest, South America (a Guyanese setting) who become Weyl's spirit guides into 'the cave of character masks' (p.17). Given a mythical and spiritual significance, this locale is explicitly related to the dark wood which Dante enters in the first canto of the Inferno yet is also patently native to its pagan setting. 'It was a complex gateway into the underworld, and the overworld of the cosmos, an Orinoco-esque or Dantesque gateway.' (p.18) Here, as Masters remembers it to Weyl, everything within reach of the senses has a deeper, profounder meaning than its surface suggests and becomes a mnemonic chip which speaks 'the language of the unconscious'. Crabs on the beach with 'their white legs of Carnival' are represented as 'nebulae' of meaning. A cherry tree near the foreshore is the world tree, an inverted tree (p.22) like that of which Abram dreamt 'crawling in a dark wood' in *The Whole Armour*. Reference to

'the hanged fisherman upon a wasteland tree' confirms that once again the tree is operating here as a tree of sacrifice and revivification, for it is also the 'gallows of god'. (p.19-20)

Masters's flight from the 'false shaman' on the foreshore may match Dante's encounter with the three beasts at the entrance to Hell; as a death dealing figure of worldly vice he represents in Harris's allegory the principle of 'collective, explosive rape' which had previously threatened the foetal Masters in the guise of an abortion. In both instances Masters is able to outwit him, although in this case it means running back from the beach into the regressive haven or Freudian paradise of his mother's womb. This retreat entails a form of deification, for in this context Masters's mother appears as 'the mother of a god in the play of Carnival' and Masters 'the young Carnival god' (p.27); identities which, however, are other than absolute divinity as suggested by the fact that they both spring from his father's wearing of '*[t]he mask of the cuckold*", an age-old 'mask of Carnival humiliation'. This archetypal mask, constituting 'one of the profoundest secrets of Carnival' (p.28), may appear to be one of humiliation, as in its Chaucerian and Rabelaisian antecedents, but in the *humility* of Masters father's decision to stand by his mother in the face of her pregnancy to another man is demonstrated 'the genius of love', which is intimately linked to 'the sorrow of pain in genesis, the slice, the cut, the blow that *dis-members*, yet may occasion one to *re-member*.' (p.23). This is the paradox with which Masters 'wrestles across the years'.

For Masters to settle for a pre-pubescent self-deification and forego the travail of worldly experience would have led, in Harris's terminology, to the erection of an absolute and his failure to attain to the level of growth which casts Masters as the spirit-guide of the novel. In this protean capacity he ultimately comes to represent not only a maturation of humanity, but, Harris has indicated in comments on the novel, an oracle of the creative unconscious and its visionary insights.[5]

Yet Masters is not the sovereign guide of the journey; the simpler, more prosaically minded (Doubting) Thomas is equally vital to the allegory. 'Thomas's Carnival New Word/old world masks were fraught with ambiguity, the ambiguity of the

saint and revolutionary *manque*'(p.21) we read. Thus Harris restores to the biblical figure and character in the *Commedia* characterized by lack of faith a creative role inasmuch as he begs for Weyl 'uncertainties....acutely more relevant to me, and my age, than Faith.' (p.33) Together with Wheyl, who, as biographer or author is also a 'character mask', they Thomas and Masters) are the 'joint authors of Carnival' (p.31). That each of these vocations are interchangeable and exist within a shared dimension of psyche is native to the fictional continuum Harris presents and his sense of comedy. 'Such is the paradox, the comedy of half-divine, half-Carnival, character masks in the medium of time. For Carnival time is partial, the past and the present and future are *parts* of an unfathomable Carnival whole beyond total capture.' (p.31) The emphasis on an 'unfathomable whole beyond total capture' flies in the face of the religious certainties or absolutes that are the flaws of dogmatism Harries believes mar Dante's allegory.

Occupying the centre ground of Harris's 'revisionary allegory' are the Market-place scenes which issue in the wake of Thomas's fateful collision with the Marble/market woman. His journey with the 'Marble woman' – a Pygmalion metaphor which suggests the implacability of folk-consciousness, something that borders on the 'frozen genesis of economic clowns' perceived by Frank Wellington – after capsizing her basket of eggs on the street leads him in stages of descent into 'the modulated Inferno, modulated Purgatory, of twentieth century colonial limbo.' Here, in a technique that runs throughout the novel, the narrative intersperses scenes which graphically illustrate Harris's sense of the 'twentieth-century divine comedy of existence' (p.45) with a form of Socratic dialogue[6] between Masters's and Weyl thus providing entertainment while instructing the reader regarding the nature of 'the paradoxical masks of Carnival' (p.43). As Thomas descends, for example, Weyl acknowledges that:

> I needed to descend with the vessel of Night into accompanying initials of the mastery of the globe, master-builder, master-philosopher, master-salesman, master of arts. I needed to descend with the schooner of Night into equally related initials of the servant of the globe, servant-builder, servant philosopher, servant of arts. How creatively interchangeable were they –

> mastery and service – upon the unborn/born person in the Carnival body of space? (p.40)

This emphasis on the *interchangeability* of roles in a polarized world is a development of the perennial carnival theme of the ironic reversal of status during the festival when slaves become kings and patricians paupers. Harris suggests that 'for a fragmented, polarized age' the wholeness conveyed by such a picture is 'terrifying' and that it is necessary to learn that '[a]ll images are partial but may masquerade for an age as absolute or sovereign.' (p.46)

A prime example of this is the Market-place itself (note the ironic capitalization); the rhetoric of which in the mouths of right-wing economic theorists is so prevalent in late twentieth century political discourse. Masters raises this topic to illustrate for Weyl a partial image masquerading as an absolute: '[t]ake the Market-place to which you have returned like a ghost from the future. As absolute or sovereign image, the Market beguiles us into overlooking the terrors associated with it over the centuries.... It is brightest when it is darkest fellowship of greed.' (p.48) The contrasting of light and dark alludes subtly to the market in its most heinous guise, the slave market. Whereas Dante's commentary on the political issues and figures of his time is sectarian and partisan, Harris cautions his readers against any false absolutes to underline the point that 'much subtlety and true honesty are needed in the 'reading' of partial images' (p.48) and that one must learn to see through the prevarications of 'mask or costume or dress' (p.49) which may be 'hypocrisy or veneer' (p.12).

Further illustration of the distinction between the 'sovereign' or fixed and the 'partial' or fluid image is provided over the course of Thomas's journey by the two former wives of the late high ranking civil servant and New Forest personage, Bartleby. Thomas's archetypal Aunt Alice, 'sister to the mask of the the cuckold' who is in fact 'everybody's purgatorial aunt' (p.38), resides at a rest home where, symbolically, 'she learned to dance in the Carnival of the Alms house for her supper' (p.40). The 'Alms house', also referred to as a 'theatre', is an emblematic colonial institution, a sort of

prison for the old, and Alice's dance is referred to as a 'colonial dance' (p.41): a phrase with potentially diminutive implications. Yet the capacity of Alice to dance is metaphysical, transcendent and seems to refer in part to the 'genius of care' she possesses and is able to transmit to Thomas. By contrast, Bartleby's widow, Lady Charlotte – whom Thomas witnesses arguing with the marble woman's glowering paramour Flatfoot Johnny in the 'Carnival limbo' of the marketplace – stands 'as if she's chained and riveted to the ground' (p.50).

Thus '[t]he *play of folk-conscience* that enveloped the chained Lady and the Carnival tyrant' [italics mine] (p.52) in their Market-place conflict over right of way between the stalls represents the danger of succumbing to a state of fixedness or absolutism. Recalling, perhaps, the ireful sinners in the Stygian lake in the seventh canto of Dante's Inferno, this scene dramatizes that stasis in the condition of the oppressed that comes about through internal opposition. It also makes a metaphysical point by anthropomorphizing characteristics of the crab in the lower aspects of its nature to represent the mutually destructive, even cannibalistic clash of the folk with the folk. 'The riddle of the crab was known to all, crab-Johnny, crab-Charlotte, as the mutual devouring principle within a chained civilization.' (p.53)

Examples of the partiality and interchangeability of all roles and states are illustrated in the entry of Thomas into the locale across Crocodile Bridge. An environ where the dwellings of the poor huddle, here like Sorrow Hill in Harris's latest novel 'the faces of the poor could become masks of profound anguish as well as profound longing, profound humour.' (p.3) Demonstrating that '[i]t is as a tormented colonial age that the twentieth century will be remembered' (p.36) and matching the wider dilemma of 'the starving or emaciated at every corner of the globe' (p.60), the masks of the Depression poor also provide insight into the 'human/animal soul' (p.36) and the interrelationship of the 'animal/human kingdom' (P.42). The bridge is a 'bone littered path' that is the symbolic divide beyond which lie the 'caves' of the 'denizens of the Inferno' (p.57). Set under the light of 'the dying Carnival sun' and an 'underworld sky' (p.57), the implications of infernal descent in this scene is obvious. The fact that Thomas's passage

into this district (with Masters and Weyl in psychical train) is simultaneously represented as a journey into the crocodile's belly, or Lady Bartleby's croc skin purse, gives, by turns, a surreal and carnivalesque twist to the action. Yet although the interior of the crocodile in part represents the bestiality of this plantation realm, the creature and those it symbolically 'houses' are described as 'another investiture or mask of god' (p.58) which runs in concert with the 'greenness and fertility of god' (p.58). The spheres of animality, humanity and divinity interpenetrate rather than exist as separate absolutes in a hierarchy of being.

Implicit in Harris's critique of the human condition of polarized roles such as mastery and service is that any revolutionary gesture that fails to address the the manifold dimensions of human existence and experience will fail to achieve renewal. Weyl makes this explicit in setting out prerequisites for 'the art of Carnival Revolution'.

> The art of Carnival revolution lay in involuntary match, involuntary equation, matched sovereign and common peoples....
>
> I sought to read Thomas's comedy of values in "art of Carnival revolution." I sought a link between the puberty of the twentieth century – the growing pains of adolescent humanity – and the uncertain desire, the uncertain necessity, to right age old wrongs everywhere. I sought a link between vulgar relief and comedy, between comedy and tragedy, a link so curious that one blended into the other or lapsed into the other, the serious into the absurd, the absurd into terror or blood or revolution. (p.63)

Thus the 'grotesquely muscular, grotesquely powerful' Flatfoot Johnny, while he 'balances the globe on his head' (p.47) – a mythical portraiture of the condition of the oppressed – is also an oppressor. As popular hero he is in fact both victim and tyrant. He is the 'foul emperor' and 'Czar of New Forest' whom the plantation men greet placatingly through the 'laced mask' of the apparatus suspending their cooking pots, each with the 'deposit of an animal face'. We are told: 'Johnny was president and revolution was taboo.' Furthermore, when Thomas stabs Johnny in defence of the the Marble woman, of whom he grown enamoured, that too fails to achieve revolution, because Thomas's motives are somewhat ill-conceived – as Maes-Jelinek comments, '[i]ronically, Thomas's

resort to involuntary crime bears some resemblance to Johnny's indignant resort to violence'[7] – and the Marble woman, rather than being liberated from the man who has tyrannized her, mourns insensibly over his corpse. The Czar may be dead, but the principal he represents is as 'old as Carnival' (p.53) and the scene ends with the refrain: '*[t]he Czar is dead, long live the Czar in the cave of abortive revolution.*' (p.67)

Another important Dantesque circle and cartographic locale in *Carnival* is the phase which begins with scenes from the 'collegiate Inferno' where the young Masters was schooled. Aside from the humour of Masters' precocious response to various teachers of his (another demonstration of the reversal of authority theme), scenes from Mr. Quabbas's 'Young Men's Cave Guild theatre' (p.77) which he attends illustrate the role of the mask in the novel. Clearly, the mask theme is deeply imbedded in the narrative and takes many turns. One vital issue here is the *function* of the mask as a device, metaphoric or otherwise, that like carnival itself 'hides us from ourselves yet reveals us to ourselves.' (p.86) The search for 'the voice of the mask, the conscience of the mask' (p.53), the 'true hidden voice of the mask' (p.53) and 'that hidden contour, the paradox of the mask' (p.54) is a process of unravelling that is 'infinite rehearsal' in Harris's vocabulary. The 'masked actors' of the Guild portray important local events in order to penetrate their substance; to penetrate the mask by donning the mask. At the same time, '[e]ach mask was felt both inwardly and outwardly as if one dangled it oneself with a ghostly dazzling hand. The epidermis of the soul also dazzled in crying to be stroked as primary mask.' (p.78) The sensual desire of the soul 'to be stroked as primary mask' is set against the rigid backdrop of the 'collegiate inferno' and the Philistine colony of which it is a microcosm.

Like every locale or frame in the novel, the Cave Guild has a profound relevance in the context of the wider comedy of existence: the psychodramas which the members of the group enact thrust them into a theatre of 'the dead, the living, the newborn' (p.78-9), such as occurs when the lawyer Martin Weyl, Jonathan's father, is forced to play the guilty Thomas. In doing this 'the mask of time slip[s] a little', anticipating the trial in which Martin will be involved directly preceding his death. In a sense, then, it is the mask

in its aspect as an agent of roles which men and women perform not only on a social but cosmic scale that is itself on trial in the cave theatre. In a moment of acute self questioning Martin is led to wonder if his unborn son will be a pawn to such forces and formulates the question '[h]ow interlinked are fate and freedom with an assembly of overlapping bodies and masks?' (p.80) This self-scrutiny over the paradox of 'fate and freedom', linked to 'the paradox of the mask' and the roles and identities it confers, strikes at the heart of Harris's consciousness of the morality of Carnival.

Here, as in several of the novels read previously, a trial figures prominently. Carnival time is traditionally a period when the authority of ruling social institutions is breached and subjected to derision. In Harris's works this often takes the form of a collapsing of the barriers which divide the high and the low, the governing and the governed such as in the revelation of a paired identity in the judge and judged welder in *Ascent to Omai.* Here this deconstructive technique is overtly set up as a challenge to

> the Sovereignty of hell no man dares breach, the sovereignty of heaven no man dares breach, except when these are perceived as pagan and therefore opening themselves to profound game between creator and creature, parent and child, governor and governed, culture and culture, age and age, civilization and civilization, science and art. (p.102)

The case of ritual matricide committed by the Amerindian prince 'descended from El Dorado' becomes the basis of a critique of 'the charisma of the law' or shared inertia of social institutions within rival societies which wear 'Carnival masks of absolute regimes' (p.113). Martin Weyl, Jonathan's father and defense for the Amerindian can see the potential of humanity as 'a family of pigmented soul, pigmented bone' and he labours to bring 'the charisma of the law' to the attention of the court. But, losing the, case he becomes a 'figure of Carnival dance....' who blunders out of court and is knocked over and killed by a dray cart. This failure is similar to fact that the child denied to Julia and Francis is born to a later generation represented by Jen and da Silva in the *Tree of the Sun*:

the marriage and cross-fertilization of cultures Martin glimpses must wait to be symbolically fulfilled in the union of his son and Amaryllis and Masters's child.

The danger of becoming a victim to the 'Carnival of history' (p.13) is illustrated in the grief of Jonathan's mother for her husband. This clearly echoes the grieving mother figure in *The Eye of the Scarecrow* and supports points raised in my discussion of that novel. 'She was a phantom of solid grief permitted only to stand at the window in which she seemed framed like a picture observing the hearse and the long procession of carriages and cars that accompanied my father's coffin to the grave' (p.112).

This is in part a condemnation of the stifling of the grieving process by the conventions of social expectation; it also points to the dangers of being 'framed' in the sense of duped by the sovereign appearance of death. In asking 'did she wish to be framed forever', the narrator is not being heartless but raising questions about the 'reading' of events, attacking the binding 'law of the frame' which creates the condition of widowhood as an absolute and searching for a possible existence 'through and beyond frames' (p.113). This is directly applicable to Harris's criticism of realism and its 'journalistic frames' and his advocacy of a revolution in the form and content of the modern novel.

> The twentieth century was a century of realism that failed utterly to plumb the reality of the pagan in ourselves, the savage urgencies, confusions, labyrinths in ourselves, the savage illuminations we so desperately needed, the inner unspoken theatres we projected upon others, the inner problematic ties between mother and son, father and daughter, mother and daughter, father and son, masked stranger and intimate stranger, masked enemy and intimate treacheries of friends, masked governor and intimate governed, masked judge and intimate judged. (p.115)

In keeping with this refusal to accept the apparent or realistic reading of events, Jonathan perceives his father's coffin as it passes in the procession to be empty and describes 'my father's Carnival funeral' as a 'masquerade' (p.116). As his mother watches she is transformed in her son's eyes and translated into mythic terms. Her grief thus attains to a

epic sacrificial status : '[s]he was a prophetess, Delphic oracle of slain queen' (p.117). As in other works Harris links the funeral to resurrection themes; the 'phantom Carnival daemon or horse' (p.120) in whose belly Martin Weyl has been interred as simultaneously a rebirth motif: it matches the animal body in which Jonathan and Amaryllis consummate their love. Moreover, Masters in a near death experience has a vision of Martin in a sort of limbo state in which, like the ghost of Tenby in *Tumatumari*, he continues to muse over the 'charisma of the law'.

Another doorway into the Inferno, matching Crocodile bridge, is revealed in Masters's employment as a common labourer, an everyman, when '[he] entered the Inferno through a factory in North London....' (p.127) Master's later reflects: 'I have ruled and served, have commanded labour and been a labourer myself, have stood high and stood low.' This reversal of the 'plantation king's' status is, of course, an overtly carnival theme and illustrates 'the comedy of parallel powers, high and low' (p.127). In addition, the factory scenes have a number of carnivalesque features, one of the most significant being the encounter with the devil that Masters suffers in the wake of a heart attack on the factory floor. '[A] gentleman with a smooth, polished mask' (p.129) appears to him and attempts to seduce him into donating his body to the state.

The devil is a common actor in various modes of carnivalesque representation, such as Mediaeval morality plays and in the field of African and Caribbean fiction puts in a notable appearance in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* (1982). Ngugi's devil primarily represents the evils of commercialism in 'Neo-imperial' times and is a grotesquely apocalyptic figure.

> The Devil was clad in a silk suit, and he carried a walking stick shaped like a folded umbrella. On his head there were seven horns, seven trumpets for sounding infernal hymns of praise and glory. The Devil had two mouths, one on his forehead and the other at the back of his head. His belly sagged, as if it were about to give birth to all the evils of the world. His skin was red, like that of a pig.(p.13)

Harris's portrait is multivalent. His devil represents not so much one cultural, political, social or economic pole as the principle of absolutism itself and the myriad tyrannies which flow from it. 'Purity that masks the extermination of others, pure religion that masks fanaticism, pure science that masks its military consequences, unfreedom and terror, absolute mechanics that mask exploitation, were his bastion.' (p.138) Masters refutes his arguments answering him, in what is almost liturgy, that he favours '*[t]ransfigurative dismemberment/rememberment and rebirth in community and of community*' (p.138) which so overwhelms the devil he vanishes.

As a counterpoint to these infernal scenes, we saw above how Aunt Alice's 'colonial dance' functioned as a symbol of liberation and a number of other instances in the novel testify to the importance of this medium and its counterparts music and song: both, of course, important elements in carnival. The gymnastics of her namesake, young Alice (Quabbas's niece) is described as a 'dance of sublimity' (p.82) so beatific that Weyl asks: 'was this a vision of paradise?' (p.83) This is given an ironic edge by the presence of her uncle Quabbas who is hiding in the bush peeping at her. The description of 'the leaves and the play of light hid[ing] her from him as within a mask' (p.83) suggests the bars of physicality and mortal travail which separate men and women from paradise. Thus Alice's dance is like the ambivalent dance of life. 'It was a knife, it was a dance. It reopened parallel lives, dressed or masked in music, in the Market-place, Carnival dance and song.' (p.86) Nonetheless it represents an important intimation of the divine and even Quabbas's death from heart attack while spying on her and his subsequent disgrace somehow marks, according to Masters the passage 'from the Inferno into Purgatory and into, may I say it, paradise.' (p.89)

This importance of dance is repeatedly evident, for example in an visionary episode demonstrating the potential for the life of the spirit 'beyond frames' through a symbolic 'dance of the boulders'. The 'human boulders' are initially depicted as either sad or drunken nihilists who desire nothing but as Weyl looks on the dance grows into 'inimitable ballet' (p.109). This later dance not only constitutes resistance to oblivion but posits the ecstatic, the celebratory, as a necessary response to and involvement with

creation. Dance is elevated to the plane of pure energy and expression, the 'cosmic dance' which is a constant in a number of religious and mystical traditions. With its primacy reinstated, the dance also can be read as a revival of sensibilities repressed and suppressed in the European psyche and colonizing ethos. As Russell McDougall writes:

> The root of cultural kinetics in Africa had been the dance; but when the dancer was removed from the dance only music remained. Africa's idealized imagery of the body was displaced, in contact and in conflict with alien cultures, and music absorbed the body in transition. Music became posture and gesture translated, a memory of the past and a vision of the future – an essential link with self. It provided the archetype of a new identity, fluid and free....[8]

In stating that '[t]he very intricacy of the dance of genesis lay in exposing a riddle of infinite parallels between so called first things and so-called last things, between innocence and guilt, between hope and hopelessness' (p.109) Harris implicitly affirms dance as expressing (encompassing and manifesting) all poles of experience.

Two poles of the dance are represented by the 'striptease of the soul' (p.150) enacted by Aimee (one of Masters's 'dubious women') in the 'Carnival theatre' (p.157) of a Nightsbridge Club and the true marriage and sacred wedding of Jonathan and Amaryllis in an act of lovemaking that *sustains* the vision of paradise and is resonant with 'the music of space' (p.161). Aimee's 'dance of purgation' (p.157) – before which Masters's mask slips, causing him, Jonathan and Amaryllis to doubt his authority as spirit guide of the heights and depths – reveals the dancer in a terrible aspect, reminiscent perhaps of the dance of destruction of figures such as the goddess Kali of India. (p.159) The union of Jonathan and Amaryllis, in contrast, represents a magical and musical exchange in which the 'superior "I" seemed to recede' in an experience of 'unbroken but untouchable wonder'.

The marriage of Jonathan and Amaryllis is a symbolic transcendence of the 'law of the frame', of absolutism and tyranny, for in the act '[w]e lived in and yet out of our frames'. The couple attain to the realms of paradise; 'the strangest climax, reality of paradise, reality of intercourse' (p.123). This differs from Dante's allegory where the

physical and spiritual sides of love are separated and in which, one could argue, sexual desire is sublimated into religious vision. Here, as mentioned above, Jonathan's and Amaryllis's consummation occurs 'within phantom animal', an acknowledgement of the physicality and animality of intercourse, in an 'orchestration' that represents and celebrates a '*coniunctio* or complex marriage of cultures' (p.124). Weyl realizes that such a union might be impossible elsewhere, such as in South Africa (p.127). Pointing to a 'phenomenal resurrection' and 'healed character' (p.144) for a world in the throes of the 'savage masquerade' of violence, the novel holds out a revolutionary ideal based on a model of redemptive sexual love, bearing out Masters' view that 'unless one brings originality to the resurrection theme it is hollow, it is impotent.' (p.148). Amaryllis holds out the caveat for a transformed humanity when she pledges in the final lines for both of them 'to respond with originality to each other's Carnival seas of innocence and guilt, each other's Carnival lands of subterfuge and truth, and each other's Carnival skies of blindness and vision.' (p.172)

At the end of this 'comedy of the globe' when the 'curtain of Carnival' falls it is with the revelation that Jane Fisher is pregnant with Masters's child, in a development which echoes a regenerative trope that appears in many of Harris novels from the earliest. Jonathan and Amaryllis will rear 'the child of a pagan and a Christian master', a symbolic reconciliation of the opposition between Lenten consciousness and the festive outlook. The establishment of 'Carnival queenship, Carnival Kingship' for Amaryllis and Jonathan as representative halves of the human divine serves to 'illumine the sacrament of pregnant form in art as in life.' (p.171). Harris links the survival and evolution of life on earth with a symbol of the renovation of the art of fiction and the arts in general: the bodily image of 'pregnant form'.

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As several critics have suggested, Harris's output over the years represents instalments in an ongoing creative process, with later novels incorporating and extending elements visible or latently present in earlier fictions. His novels are best read as an opus – an interrelated, evolutionary series of movements or explorations. With *Carnival* (and this applies to the other novels of *The Carnival Trilogy* which continue to develop the elements and features we have discussed), Harris has realized through the creation of a 'full-blown allegory'[9] the revolutionary potential he sensed in Caribbean carnival from the outset of his writings.

In each of the works previously discussed carnival is explicitly or implicitly present; as incident, theme or symbolic complex shaping content. This is also reflected in *form* with the presence of carnivalesque narrative features which have both traditional and highly innovative dimensions. It is in the novel *Carnival* that Harris uses the festival to full effect by adopting it as a matrix through which to renew a fundamental text of Western tradition in a cross-cultural re-reading. Manifesting and reworking many of the classic and novel carnival features outlined in previous chapters of this study, the novel is particularly noteworthy for its celebration of the cross-cultural principal in its profoundest potential to break away from the classical realist tradition into a new fictional mode or genre. This Harris calls 'carnival epic'.

These observations are partial and selective; to expect otherwise would be contrary to the sort of readings Harris's novels demand and the very provisionality of the construction of any argument regarding the text is itself in keeping with a carnivalesque *reading*.

Jonas, in her reading of *Genesis of the Clowns*, identifies a characteristic which holds for Harris's work in general: that in the act of reading the traditional authority of the author or text is itself partially reversed. This is particularly apposite when one considers Harris's repeated assertion that in the creation of his fictions he is not the sole agent, but works in conjunction with 'the other hand', the transpersonal inspirator whose source is

the 'collective psyche' or 'world unconscious'.[10] Jonas states that ideally the reader too '*muses* freely, making his [or her] own connections and inferences. Such an act of the grotesque declares that creativity is not the privilege solely of the artist; each reader of reality, of the 'text', is invited to re-create the world for himself [or herself] .'[11]

The term 'freely', the reference to the grotesque and the emphasis on the creativity of the reader together imply that the reader can choose to be not simply a critic but *a celebrant* of the Carnival of the text.

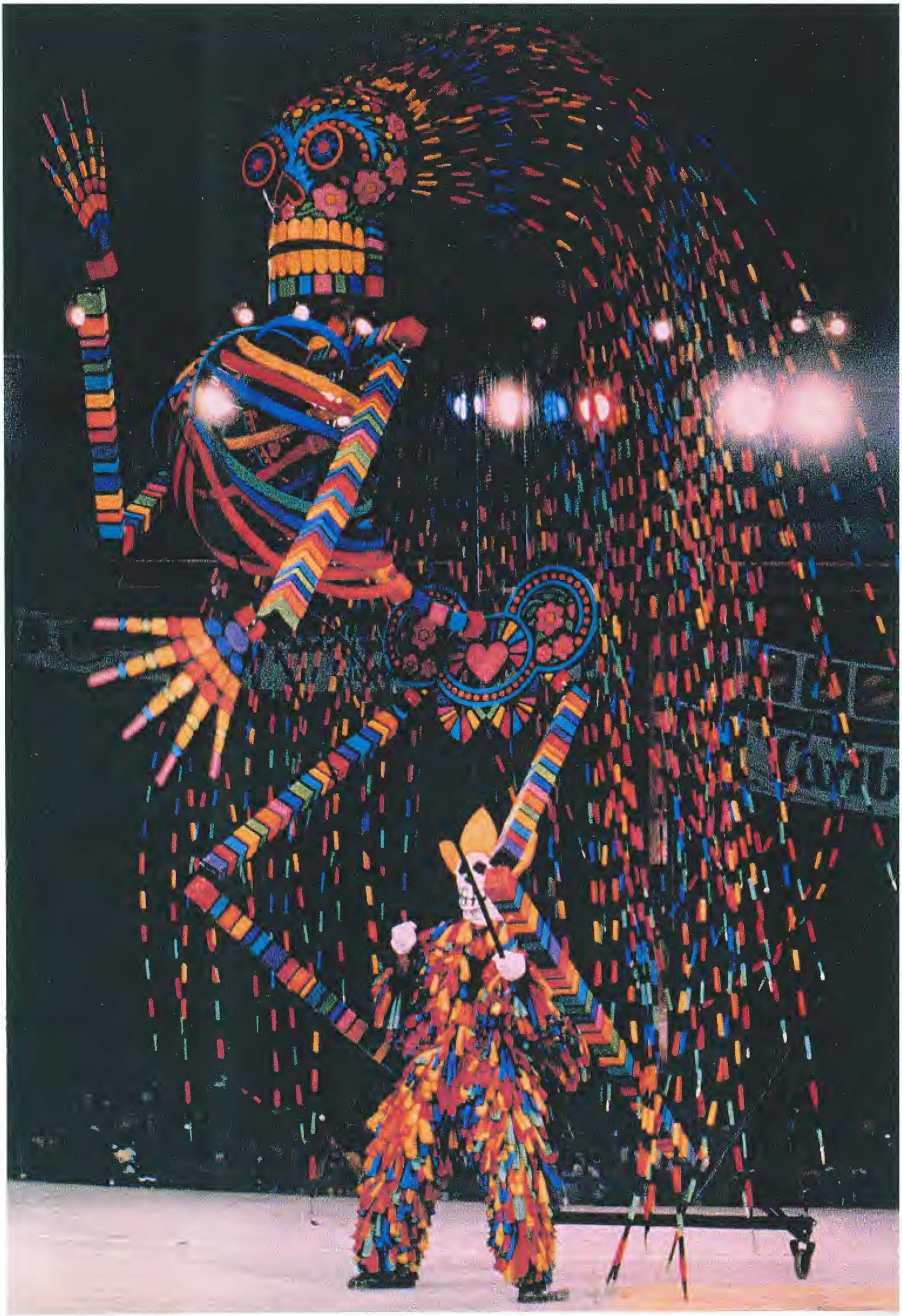
Bakhtin, in his classic study on Rabelais, complained that '[t]he grotesque tradition peculiar to the market-place and the academic literary tradition have parted ways and can no longer be brought together.'[12] Harris, seeking a 'renascence of the arts' through the blending of cross-cultural, folk elements with 'master texts' of the Western literary tradition offers a away from that deadlock. '*Gone is the notion of a single canon*' – this is carnival time.

We have seen how carnival evolves over the course of Harris's work into a multivalent symbolic complex, central metaphor, visionary nexus and metafictional concern. Complementary to the development of carnival as event and implicit complex in his novels are narrative features and strategies which constitute a unique instance and new mode of the carnivalesque in twentieth century fiction. There are sufficient grounds for claiming that this is Harris's primary distinction as a writer.

However, such categorization is ultimately of secondary importance to the imperatives of Harris's vision. The greatest challenge posed by his immense creative vitality is the caveat of paradoxical hope he holds out for the creation of a global community from the chaos of the late twentieth century world through compassion, 'the genius of love' and freedom of the imagination.

I close with a quotation from *The Womb of Space*:

> The paradox of cultural heterogeneity, or cross-cultural capacity, lies in the evolutionary thrust it restores to orders of the imagination, the ceaseless dialogue it inserts between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs or bridges of community.[13]



Notes

1 See Chapter One of this thesis, p.36

2 A Reading of Dante's *Inferno*, Wallace Fowlie, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981; The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante, Teodolina Barolini, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992

3 See Introduction, Harris, 1983, p.xv

4 'The Human Comedy; *Carnival* and *The Infinite Rehearsal*' Al Creighton in Maes-Jelinek, 1991, p.192

5 Cited in 'Revisioning Allegory: Wilson Harris's Carnival', Stephen Slemon, Kunapipi, Vol VIII, No. Two, 1986

6 Russell McDougall writes: '[t]he conversation that follows has already been announced as a special kind of dialogue, a kind quite common in carnivalized literature – "dialogue on the threshold" (Schwellendialog). It is also.... a dialogue that is conducted in the context of laughter, for we are on the threshold of Carnival – the birth of diverse masks as the substance of reality.

The threshold situation is pervasive throughout the varied settings of Harris's Carnival theatre. It is worth noting that the generic origin of the "dialogue on the threshold" is the Socratic dialogue, which Bakhtin singles out as having "definitive significance" for the carnivalization of the novel.' 'Wilson Harris and the Art of Carnival Revolution', Russell McDougall, Commonwealth Essays and Studies, Vol. 10, Autumn 1987, p.82

7 '"Carnival" and Creativity in Wilson Harris's fiction', Hena Maes-Jelinek; Gilkes, 1989, p.54

8 'Music in the body of the Book of Carnival', Russel McDougall, p.5

9 'Revisioning Allegory: Wilson Harris's *Carnival*', Stephen Slemon; Kunapipi Vol VIII, No. Two, 1986, p.46

10 These points are reiterated inumerable times in the lectures and interviews collected together in The Radical Imagination, (ed.) Riach and Williams, 1992

11 Jonas, 1992, p.81

12 Bakhtin, 1984;1968, p109

13 Harris, 1983, p.xviii

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